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Norman Blake and his Pre-War Guitars Co. signature models

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Photograph
Courtesy of Martin Guitar

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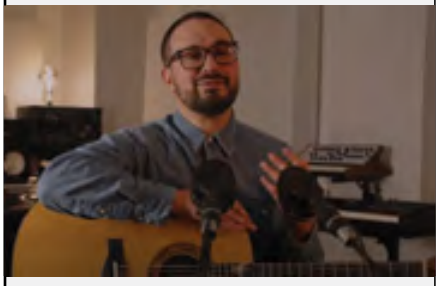
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HANDY MAN
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BOOM-CHUCK
Cathy Fink teaches this essential rhythm. (p. 42)



GOOD COMPANY
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PRS SE A20E
An all-purpose, affordable acoustic-electric. (p. 78)

the ACOUSTIC GUITAR podcast

Join us for conversations that explore why we play, collect, build, obsess over guitars and how rewarding it is to make music of our own. Each month, we connect you with great guitarists–from preeminent pickers and fingerstyle sensations, to master teachers, luthiers, songwriters, and the community at large.

In a recent episode of the Acoustic Guitar Podcast, **Eric Bibb** shares captivating stories and insights about his musical upbringing, the challenges of being categorized as a blues player, and the role music plays in uniting and shaping the world today. Listen and subscribe at AcousticGuitar.com/podcast or wherever you get your podcasts!

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Fax: (510) 217-3522

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THE FRONT PORCH

Madison Cunningham



CLAIRE MARIE VOGEL

When C.F. Martin & Co. introduced the D-45 in 1933, it was the largest, fanciest, and most expensive offering in the venerable guitar maker's line. Martin made only 91 D-45s from that year until 1942, when it ceased production of the model for the next quarter-century. Today the early D-45 is one of the most coveted of all steel-string guitars, and when a clean example surfaces it can sell for as much as—if not more—than a comfortable home in most parts of the United States.

Martin's latest version of this legendary flattop—the D-45 Modern Deluxe—is a fitting cover star. This opulent instrument, which combines the best historical and modern features, is emblematic of the thriving acoustic guitar market, as explored here in *AG*'s annual year-in-gear feature. Despite ongoing supply chain issues and bottlenecked production schedules, legacy and boutique makers alike unveiled a dazzling array of new models for all budgets.

Like many other makers, Texas–based Collings Guitars was hit hard by the impact of the coronavirus, compounded by the rising costs of living in the Austin metropolitan area. For the Makers & Shakers department, I talked to Collings' head of production, Steve Nall, about the state of the company five years after the death of its founder, Bill Collings. Nall recently assumed the role held for decades by Bruce VanWart—selecting and voicing the woods for each guitar—and he explained how Collings is soldiering on in this difficult stretch, while maintaining the company's fastidiously high standards.

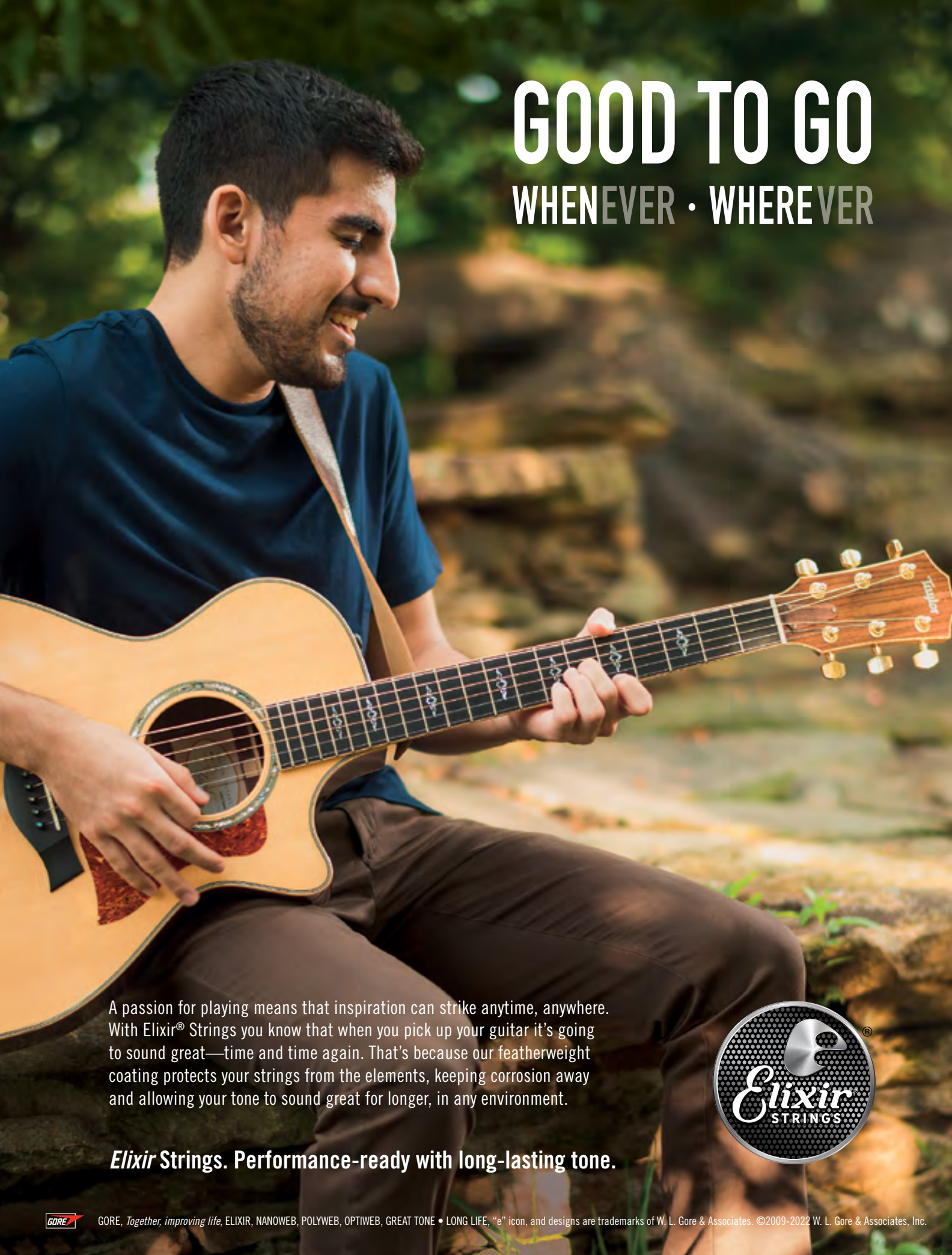
Aside from that fancy Martin on the cover, you might have noticed that this issue in your hands—or on your screen—looks just a little different than usual. That's because we have updated the magazine with more lesson and song content, as we have always been committed to teaching players in all styles and at all levels, encouraging them to explore their instruments through trying many different approaches.

In the song department, as usual, this issue includes a balanced mix of the classic and the new. By popular request, for instance, there's an easy arrangement of the Mamas and the Papas' "California Dreamin'," released back in 1965, as well as Madison Cunningham's recent song "Life According to Raechel," never before published, which happens to serve as an introduction to a tuning that might be new to you—C standard.

Cunningham is an excellent example of a cohort of young singer-songwriters who are treating the acoustic guitar in new and exciting ways. In Guitar Talk, she tells editor at large Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers how she has experimented with alternate tunings, sometimes dropped to as low as B, and beater guitars like a 1960s Silvertone with a rubber bridge to find her own voice.

As always, I'd love to hear your thoughts on the latest issue—and on anything you aspire to play on your instrument, and how we can help.

—Adam Perlmutter
Adam.Perlmutter@Stringletter.com



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GUITAR TALK

CLAIRE MARIE VOGEL

Lost and Found

How Madison Cunningham discovers fresh sounds in unusual tunings and beater guitars

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Madison Cunningham is a true triple-threat musician: not just a gifted singer and inventive songwriter, but a wickedly good guitarist—a seeker of unconventional riffs and tones on both acoustic and electric instruments.

Just 26, the Southern California native got an early start with music, picking up her father's guitar when she was seven. She grew up immersed in church music and didn't fully discover the titans of pop/rock songwriting until her later teens. Cunningham released her first album, *Authenticity,* at 18, and hit the spotlight five years later with the Grammy-nominated *Who Are You Now,* and through her extensive collaborations with Chris Thile on the public radio show *Live from Here* and on tour with Punch Brothers. Along the way Cunningham also paid tribute to her diverse influences in a remarkable series of weekly cover videos, leading to the mostly acoustic EP *Wednesday (Extended Edition)* and another Grammy nomination in 2021.

Inspired by such free spirits as Joni Mitchell, Juana Molina, Jeff Buckley, and Fiona Apple, Cunningham's songwriting is sophisticated—full of unexpected harmonies and melodic/rhythmic twists—yet also hooky and accessible. And her music is so engaging and energized that it's easy to overlook what a sly and subtle lyricist she is.

All of these qualities are abundantly clear on her new album, *Revealer,* another substantial creative leap forward. Anchoring the songs are deep grooves and intricate patterns played primarily on low-tuned and open-tuned guitars, including a 1960s-era Silvertone acoustic with a rubber bridge that has become one of her signature sounds. (See the sidebar, plus World Premiere on page 60 for a transcription of her song "Life According to Raechel" that spotlights this instrument.)

On the cusp of the release of *Revealer,* I reached Cunningham at her guitar-packed office/studio in Los Angeles' Highland Park neighborhood for a wide-ranging conversation about her travels—so far—as a guitarist and songwriter.

You really have your own voice on both acoustic and electric guitar, which is rare among singer-songwriters. Which came first?
The instruments that we had lying around the

house were always acoustic, so I started on acoustic guitar and found my voice there first. That's where I learned basic chords and started incorporating open tunings.

When I was around 15 or 16, I started transferring what I knew onto electric because I was enamored by it, but I quickly realized that it was like the difference in playing a violin and a cello. The way that I had approached acoustic was highly percussive and rhythmic, and on the electric, the strings had more give and were thinner and louder. So it took me a lot of years to figure out what my voice was on electric. Transferring the open tunings I was playing on acoustic to the electric was a bit of a lightbulb moment for me.

Which tunings do you mean?

What I primarily play in when I write my songs is D A D F♯ A D [open D]. I was playing in DADGAD a lot and then someone just tuned my G string to an F♯, and it changed the way I started to create voicings and put together chord progressions. So that was completely course correcting for me.

What are some songs you play in open D?

Off of my last record, "Something to Believe In" [capo II], "Looking Alive" [capo II], "Plain Letters" [capo III], and "Common Language" are in open D. On *Revealer,* "Your Hate Could Power a Train" [capo I], "Collider Particles" [capo I], and "Our Rebellion" [capo III].

What I love about open tunings is that there are so many hidden voicings and cool scales that you don't expect. That's been just endlessly fun for me to get lost in. I like to be a little bit lost and sort of have one headlight out, not sure exactly where I'm going. That's where a lot of discovery happens.

You also use a lot of lowered standard tuning—down to C or even down to B.

Exactly. I play in C standard a lot, which is a half step above baritone. Sometimes it's B. For the song "Anywhere" on *Revealer,* that's B. "All I've Ever Known" and "Who Are You Now" are C standard. So I just alternate between [open tunings and low standard] all the time in my writing and in my playing. Those are my go-to methods or modes.

You must have to set up your guitars to handle going that low.

Yeah, you have to. Otherwise it's like a piece of paper flapping in the wind. There's no give. The [Fender] Jazzmaster that I play, it's like that guitar was made to be a baritone. It just handles thick, low strings very well. I get no issues with buzzing on that guitar. But this Harmony [Juno small-body electric] guitar that I'm playing my open tunings on is a little bit more sensitive.

What is that low-tuned Silvertone you've been playing?

It's a parlor acoustic guitar with a rubber bridge that gives it this really wild, almost immediately exotic-sounding, low-sustain sort of effect. That guitar is throughout the record, sent through an amp, so it's a cool, electric sort of identity.

I do play a bit of [straight] acoustic on the record, but mostly it's the rubber bridge and the Jazzmaster.

'I love beater guitars, and that's what I fill my office with, because those usually have so many songs and ideas pumping through them.'

–MADISON CUNNINGHAM

Where did the rubber bridge idea come from? Did you hear someone play one?

The first person had to have been Blake Mills. And then from there, my producer, Tyler [Chester], bought one from Reuben Cox of Old Style Guitar Shop here in L.A. During the pandemic, Tyler let me borrow it and then didn't let me give it back. I wrote so many songs on the new record with that guitar. It was immediately inspiring to me because it's also a baritone.

I take that guitar with me everywhere and preach the gospel of the rubber bridge. It's become a sound that I lean on heavily, and actually, that's the case for a lot of musicians here in L.A. It seems like that gospel is starting to spread and people are using it all over everything.

What guitar do you play for traditional acoustic sounds?

This Collings dreadnought [D2H Traditional] is the guitar I reach for every day when I'm in my office and writing songs. Sadly, it didn't make it on to the record just because I didn't quite own it yet. Really it's the best acoustic guitar I've ever owned.

Overall, you seem drawn to unconventional, funkier guitar sounds. What is the appeal? Is it just to create a sound you don't hear all the time?

With guitar, I get bored of the way that we think it ought to be played, the way that I thought for a long time it had to be played. You know, there's so much possibility that it's hard for me not to feed it through weird effects.

There's one song, "Your Hate Could Power a Train," that has a ukulele that I detuned a whole octave. That song is really aggressive, but it's played on ukulele. I thought that was so funny, but I didn't do it because of the irony. I'm constantly wanting to see where the guitar can go and what it can sound like. That venture holds my curiosity and excitement constantly.

Your whole approach to guitar strikes me as so song-oriented, rather than showcasing leads or any kind of technique.

Yeah, that's been a goal of mine. I care about songwriting first and foremost, so all the musical elements are there to prop that up, guitar included. It's the instrument I probably love the most and feel the most at home on. But at the same time, if the song doesn't call for it, I will quickly throw it out.

The guitar parts in some of these new songs remind me of Afro-pop, with those fast arpeggios and riffs up the neck. Is that a style you've tuned into?

One hundred percent. Dust to Digital, if you're aware of that as a social media platform, basically just showcases all these beautiful videos of people around the world playing traditional music, and that account really did [spark] so many ideas.

Just watching people play guitar into these lower-quality amps . . . It was all down to the fingers and the playing, and that was so instantly inspiring to me. It was a great reminder that gear is just a vehicle. It's not what's most important. I don't view a more expensive instrument as more inspiring. It's usually the opposite, actually. I love beater guitars, and that's what I fill my office with, because those usually have so many songs and ideas pumping through them. And you know, there's something about owning gear that's replaceable. That's a fun thing for creating.

Many songs on this album are driven by drums in a way that reminds me of Paul Simon's *The Rhythm of the Saints* or *Graceland*. Were the beats central to writing these songs?
Oh, yeah. Drums and bass probably inspire me the most. I am so drawn to the way those function together in the song. A lot of the drum parts were coming together in my head while guitar parts and melodies and lyrics were being written. So I definitely made a point of that being at the forefront of the recording.

Also on the rhythm side, you have an awful lot of songs with unusual meters, in sevens and whatnot. Where do you think that aspect of your songwriting comes from?
The first time I ever heard an odd-meter song that I didn't detect being odd-meter, and then figured it out later, was a Juana Molina song. Just her guitar-playing and writing completely shifted the way I thought about guitar in general—not just about rhythm and meter. I was obsessed with her music and still am, and I think as time went on, the [odd meters] became a natural instinct to me. Music students are going to notice that no matter what, but I was hoping we could create music where it felt incredibly natural and people wouldn't necessarily sit there and count.

You didn't want to make the songs like math problems.
Yeah, because who wants that?

In general, I get the sense that as a songwriter and guitarist, you're coming less from a theory place and more from just searching for sounds.
Yeah. It's all me throwing paint at the wall and just seeing what sticks. The way I've created and the way I learned music was just loving it and trying it and understanding it from a more primal and instinctual place. Theory never made sense to me. It actually always kind of severed me from music. That's the reason I didn't go to school and decided to learn by watching and listening, because that was my entry point in the music world: my ear. That's not to say that I know zero theory—some of it makes sense to me. But mostly I just need to be figuring it out as I go.

That reminds me of what you were saying earlier about how open tunings help you get a little lost.
Exactly. When you have no idea where it's going, that's my favorite place to be, because it's pure discovery and joy rather than, "I can't play that chord because jazz school or whatever taught me that these chords can't live together." I don't have the burden of that knowledge. So many people I know, though, are smarter because of it. I look up to them and benefit from their knowledge, but that's not the way I have come to understand music.

At the same time, for someone not so versed in theory, you have found your way to a very wide melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic vocabulary that you use in songs.
Oh, man, that's cool. I'm glad that you think so.

You played so many instruments on the new album: all these guitars, keyboards, mandocello, lap steel, drums, bass. . . Why did you wind up doing it that way? Was the pandemic a factor?
The pandemic didn't influence it. Before any of that went down, we had talked about taking that approach, because the way I had built demos in the past was playing everything. And then I would get musicians to come and play it better.

So the initial attempt [on *Revealer*] was to see if I could make a record where I played


JAKE DAHM

THE RUBBER BRIDGE SOUND

Reuben Cox of Old Style Guitar Shop in Los Angeles specializes in reinventing cheap catalog guitars like Cunningham's circa 1960s Silvertone. Each guitar is different, he says, but he typically resets the neck, does fretwork or other adjustments as needed, and then sets up the guitar with a rubber bridge (a block of wood wrapped in rubber), flat-wound strings, and a magnetic pickup designed for loud electric guitars. Madison Cunningham's Silvertone has a Seymour Duncan Hot Rails pickup and gauge 13 strings, and it's tuned down to C, nearly in baritone range. When she plays the guitar through an amp, as she does throughout her newest album, the sound is otherworldly—almost like the guitar is underwater. ***—JPR***

everything. The first song in particular, "All I've Ever Known," is the only song where I do play absolutely everything. But I think actually the pandemic worked against that [approach], because I was already so alone and isolated and just tired of hearing my own thoughts, and I actually needed an outsource of inspiration.

How do you go about layering parts like that? Do you start with guitar or drums, or use a click or loop to lock it in?
The first song I did, I used a click. I started with guitar and probably did bass next, then drums, and built everything else around that. That was the easiest way to start.

Other songs were started in a similar way but finished with different elements, different players. It was this interesting hodgepodge of whatever made sense in that moment. The last record was very much, "Here's exactly what's going to happen." This one was far more instinctual. I loved that there were no rules.

When layering a lot of parts yourself, it can be hard to keep it from sounding mechanical. Do you find there's any particular key to maintaining the feel of a track when you're doing so much of it?
I think recording as live as you can, even if it's to yourself, is one way of making it feel like it's living and breathing. And the temptation is always there to completely perfect everything, and in doing that, you can suck a lot of the life of the song. One of my methods was like, "Yeah, I want to try to get it right, like it's not riddled with mistakes or gaffes, but I want it to feel like an actual human is playing." So I would definitely leave a couple of mistakes for that very reason, because I think that really helps with the overall fluidity. I tried to play along to myself as though I was playing with a band.

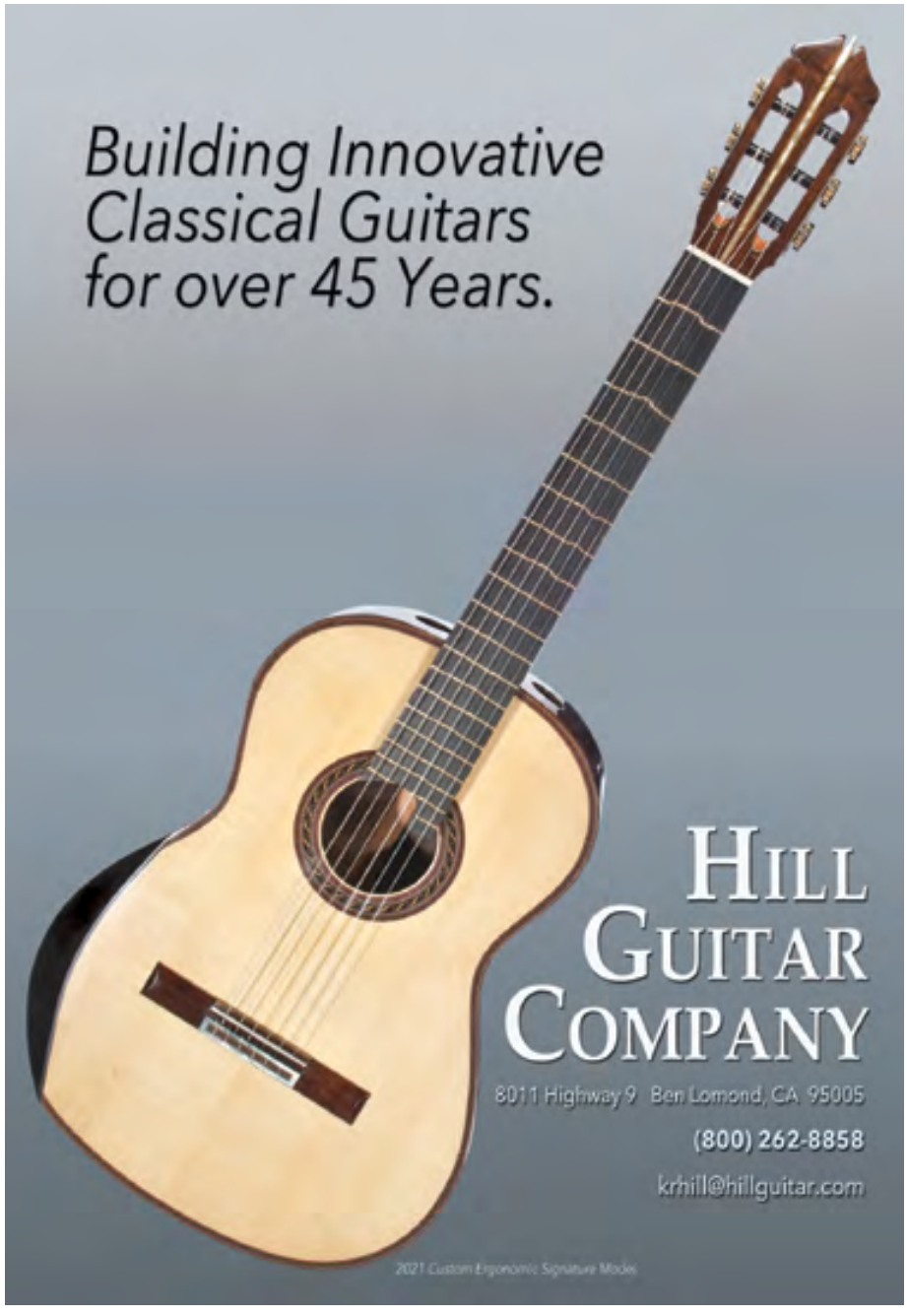
Along with your original music, you've released a lot of great, inventive covers of all kinds of music. Does interpreting songs like that feed into or guide your songwriting?
Yeah, 100 percent. You obviously didn't write the song, but in covering it and making it your own, there's a very similar process to songwriting. You're playing something that you believe. In doing those covers, I was trying to show, "Yeah, these are things that influenced me." But more than that, I really wanted to feel those songs under my fingers and learn something new about them. I was able to take new chord ideas from learning the songs, and that was the impetus for embarking on weeks and weeks of just learning covers.

Also, I was so envious of people I love and respect, like Sara and Sean Watkins, who know so many songs and can just pull them out of their hat. And I thought, I want to force myself to learn as many songs as possible, so I can bring them out if I need to.

My sense from listening to your music is that you have a very wide-open curiosity about songs from different eras and genres.
If my musical tastes were dinner guests, none of them would get along! I don't know that any of them would find things to talk about.

Who would be invited to your dinner?
Björk, number one. Juana Molina for sure. Jeff Buckley, Rufus Wainwright . . . I mean, these people would probably get along socially. George Harrison, Ry Cooder, the list goes on and on.

The beauty to me is there's so much music out there, and I really do learn from it. And so much music that I hated at first ended up being the most foundational music to me, so I try to keep my mind open. If there's something I have a real disdain for immediately, I give myself a year. And usually I come around or find something in it and it's like, "Wow, I learned something from this." My ear just wasn't stretched for it at the time. AG



Freddie Green



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STREAMLINE YOUR SWING

THE LEGACY OF **FREDDIE GREEN**—AND WHAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM JAZZ'S MOST IMPORTANT RHYTHM GUITARIST

BY NICK ROSSI

In early 1937, guitarist Freddie Green, then barely 26, took on a new job with one of the ascendant bandleaders of the day, Count Basie. Little could Green have known that he would hold down that guitar chair for the next half century. The Basie orchestra, with its All American Rhythm Section, quickly came to epitomize swing to both music fans and fellow musicians alike. Its influence was widespread within a matter of a couple of years, and the orchestra continues to thrive long after its contemporaries have faded into history.

Green was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on March 31, 1911, and spent his formative years living with an aunt in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. After a brief return to Charleston, he began his professional life, which took him back to Manhattan, where he became part of a musical community of Black musicians with diverse approaches to jazz. [See "The String Kings of Harlem Swing" in the July/August 2021 issue. —*ed.*]. He worked cafes and night clubs, with small combos and stride pianists, switching from banjo and ukulele to guitar in 1933. For the next three years, as the swing era came into focus, Green paid dues and developed his own rhythm feel, alongside a variety of musicians, before landing his big gig with pianist Count Basie.

Historians split the Basie band history into two eras: the Old and New Testament bands, loosely divided by the year 1950. The single constant in all of these aggregations aside from the leader was Green. He played an acoustic instrument until the very end; it was only after several decades that sound technicians even started putting a microphone on him. To say he was the most important big band guitarist in the history of jazz is perhaps an understatement, as his approach, sound, and feel are synonymous with rhythm guitar playing in jazz.

In the following pages, I will focus on Green's approach and development during Basie's Old Testament period. Using the blues in particular, I'll pick out some ideas that are both key to understanding the jazz master's style and helpful in building your own approach to swing rhythm guitar.

THE BASIC INGREDIENTS

Exploring Green during the Old Testament years reveals the basic ingredients of the style for which he is so celebrated. In most photos from the period, Green can be seen in the standard big-band rhythm guitarist pose: seated, left leg over right, guitar resting at an angle on his knee. The angle could have been anywhere from 20 to 45 degrees, largely based on the acoustics of the venue. Basie eventually brought Green down beside the piano, but that was a late change in formation; most of the 1940s found the guitar player at the end of the trombones near the drummer's hi-hat. This was functional, as the guitar and drums worked interdependently.

In film footage of the band from this period, Green's hand movement is remarkably consistent. He held his picking hand in a loose, relaxed shape reminiscent of what jazz guitarist George Van Eps described in his 1939 method book. In this approach, the pick, which Green always used, is held between the thumb and index finger, while the remainder of the hand stays relaxed, enough so that a broom handle could easily be inserted in the space between the fingers and palm. Well into his later years,

Green usually strummed over the fretboard, around the guitar's neck-to-body joint, but sometimes as far up as the 12th fret. This explains, in part, his drum-like sound—less of a chunk or snap and more like a small tom drum. As was common practice at the time, Green often employed a figure-eight stroke, striking beats 1 one and 3 closer to the headstock and 2 and 4 closer to the bridge.

What is arguably most important about Green's technique is what he did with his fretting hand. Though the guitarist became known for his one-note chords, throughout his career he fretted fuller forms. Having mastered control of the strings with his fretting fingers, he could emphasize any note in a chord while muting neighboring strings. By using his left-hand thumb to deaden the low E string—and his other fingers to dampen other strings—Green was able to make his guitar double as as a percussion instrument. Additionally, his fretting hand functioned as a damper, controlling decay, sustain, and release. Films show his left hand in constant motion, moving from chord form to chord form, while gripping and releasing the fretboard.



A 1940 Stromberg ad featuring Freddie Green

PUBLIC DOMAIN

WHAT HE PLAYED

Throughout his professional career, Freddie Green played archtops, the sizes of which ranged from 16 inches to nearly 19 inches at the lower bout. These instruments had 25.5-inch-scale fretboards and either parallel- or ladder-braced soundboards designed with volume in mind.

Photos of Green before Basie show the guitarist with a smaller New York–made Epiphone Triumph, which he replaced with Epiphone's top-of-the line Emperor not long after he joined the orchestra. By early 1939, Green played a Stromberg Master 300, made by the legendary Boston guitar shop. It was this instrument that Green played throughout the 1940s.

In terms of setup, Green preferred heavy-gauge brass or bronze strings, with notoriously high action. While the action certainly helped with projection, it also gave Green more control over which strings to emphasize as he selectively reduced the number of notes in his chords. *—NR*

A DECEPTIVELY STRAIGHTFORWARD APPROACH

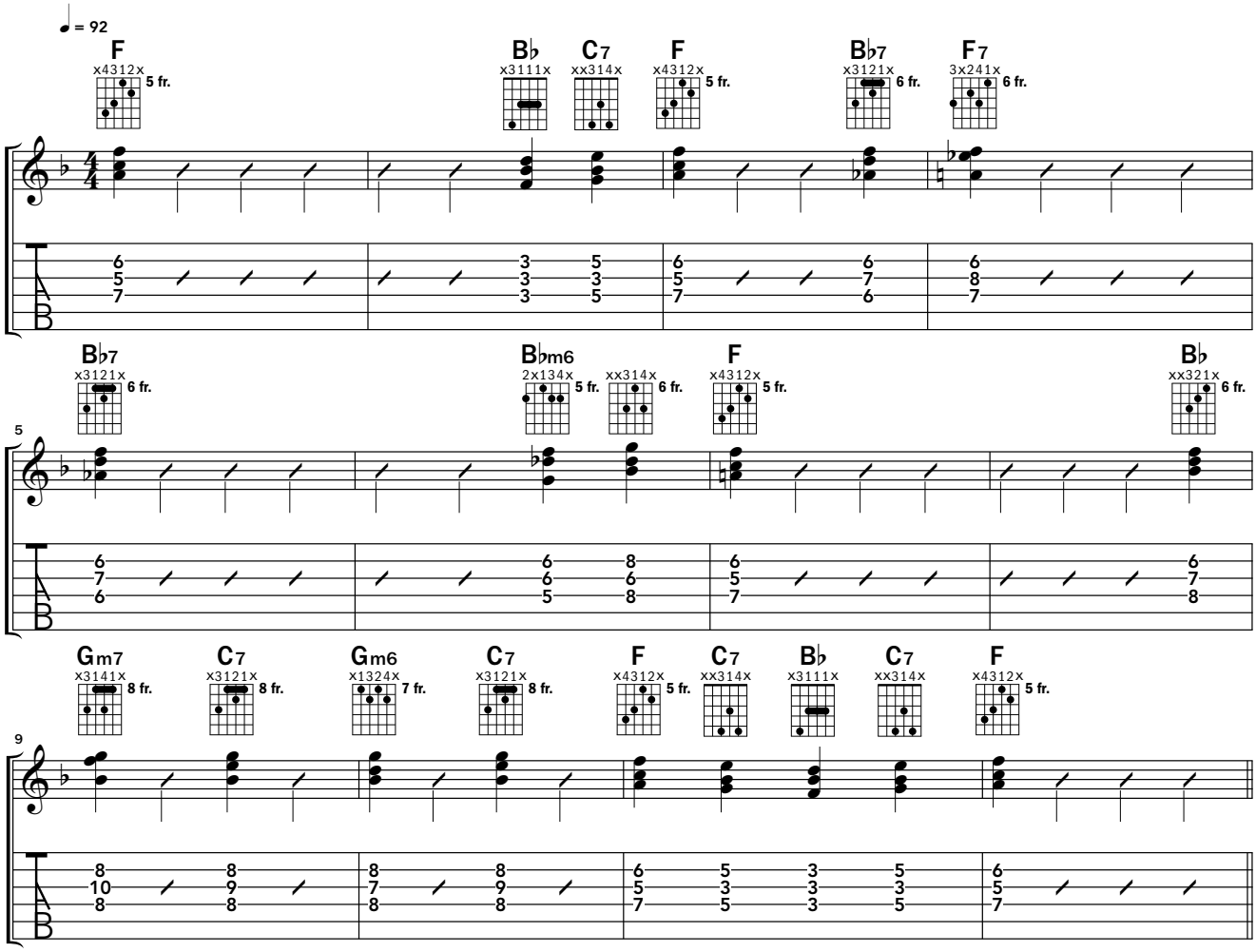
Now let's explore a handful of examples of Green's style based on Count Basie recordings from the Old Testament era. Begin by using the full chord shapes and playing each example slowly, to help understand Green's chordal concepts. Continue by pruning down the chords, emphasizing as few as one note in each voicing. The goal is to have control over the entire fretboard and use the guitar both percussively and harmonically. The subtleties of Green's approach are nearly impossible to capture in standard notation, so a close aural inspection of recordings is highly recommended. Also, in many cases, it can be challenging to clearly define what exactly Green is playing. He never penned a method book, but we can present some well-educated guesses based on study of audio and video recordings.

Let's start with the blues—the musical form and feeling which was so integral to the Basie band. **Example 1** comes from a March 1938 small band recording of "Good Mornin' Blues" that managed to distill the spirit of the orchestra to five instruments. Here, Green plays fuller chord forms while already displaying a relaxed drive with his right hand. The chorus is a great example of how he approached the standard 12-bar form. Already we hear an emphasis on the D string, a hallmark of Green's style. But in this smaller band context—and due to the absence of a piano—Green sounds notes on the G and B strings more consistently than later in his career. And though the chord shapes he used contained notes on the first string, he only occasionally ghosted those high notes.

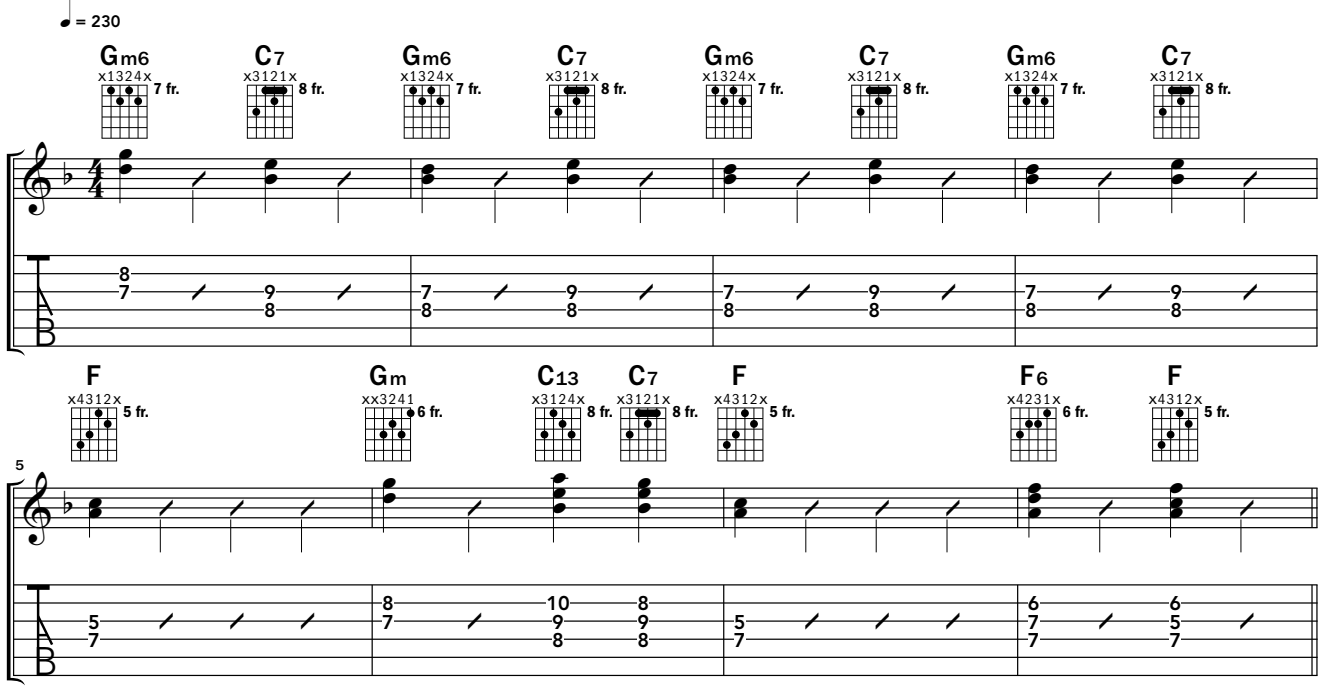
Major and minor sixth chords were important to swing-era jazz. Bar 6, for example, features a typical variant of two beats of a dominant seventh chord, followed by two beats of the minor, but Green moves from B♭7 to a pair of different voicings for B♭m6, subtly changing the tonality and providing more internal movement. Beyond the harmonic choices, the original recording provides a great example of what Green later termed his foursquare rhythm: even, measured quarter-note strokes that manage to stay relaxed but propel the beat forward.

In January 1938, Green, along with Basie and few of his band members, appeared in a

Example 1 (à la “Good Mornin’ Blues”)



Example 2 (à la “Honeysuckle Rose”)



jam session onstage at Carnegie Hall as part of Benny Goodman's famous appearance at that venue. While much has been made about Green's unexpected chord solo on "Honeysuckle Rose," the rhythm breakdown featuring bassist Walter Page is the focus of **Example 2**.

The first two measures show how Green often used different pairs of notes from the same chord to provide movement without switching shapes. For the Gm6 chord, he emphasized the notes on strings 2 and 3 in bar 1, but those on 3 and 4 in bar 2. Green would eventually shift all of this movement to the D and G strings, as that string pair was in less competition with the other instruments and could therefore cut through Basie's increasingly complex arrangements. In general, as the band played more, Green began to play less, which is another characteristic of his style.

In terms of the picking hand, the recording suggests Green is changing up his strum pattern throughout this typical Basie breakdown. The long-short strokes (not conveyed in notation), which lend an almost boom-chuck feel, are likely the result of the figure-eight pattern. The backbeat (beats 2 and 4) is slightly more snappy than Green usually played, but there is plenty of even quarter-note feel throughout—all of which shows just how big his rhythmic toolbox was.

Example 3 is taken from a spring 1944 Armed Forces Radio Service version of the Basie band's hit theme "One O'clock Jump." After a four-bar piano intro, the rhythm section plays without the orchestra. The blues changes Green plays here are much more streamlined than those in Ex. 1. Each chord is severely pruned—sometimes to just one member, as in bars 9–12—allowing the soloist or other instruments to provide additional harmonic information. This example includes another device often employed by Green—the diminished passing chord—on the last beat of bar 8. Because Green is again heavily emphasizing the notes on the D string, there is both explicit (D string) and implicit (G string) chromatic movement. It's a harmonic sleight of hand that leaves our ears to provide some of the resolution. Note also the use of two different F shapes in the final two measures; the higher voiced chord enables some nice ascending movement while providing emphasis on that important D string.

Green's general concept of the guitar was a percussive timekeeping instrument capable of delivering as little or as much harmonic information as the playing situation demanded.

Though not indicated in notation, the quarter notes are again slightly different lengths. The short-long effect is likely the product of figure-eight strokes with the strums on the downbeats played towards the headstock. A good way to practice this technique is to start slowly and emulate Green's sound, even exaggerating the width of the figure-eight pattern. Eventually that movement can be tightened and the tempo increased while retaining the feel and sound of this approach.

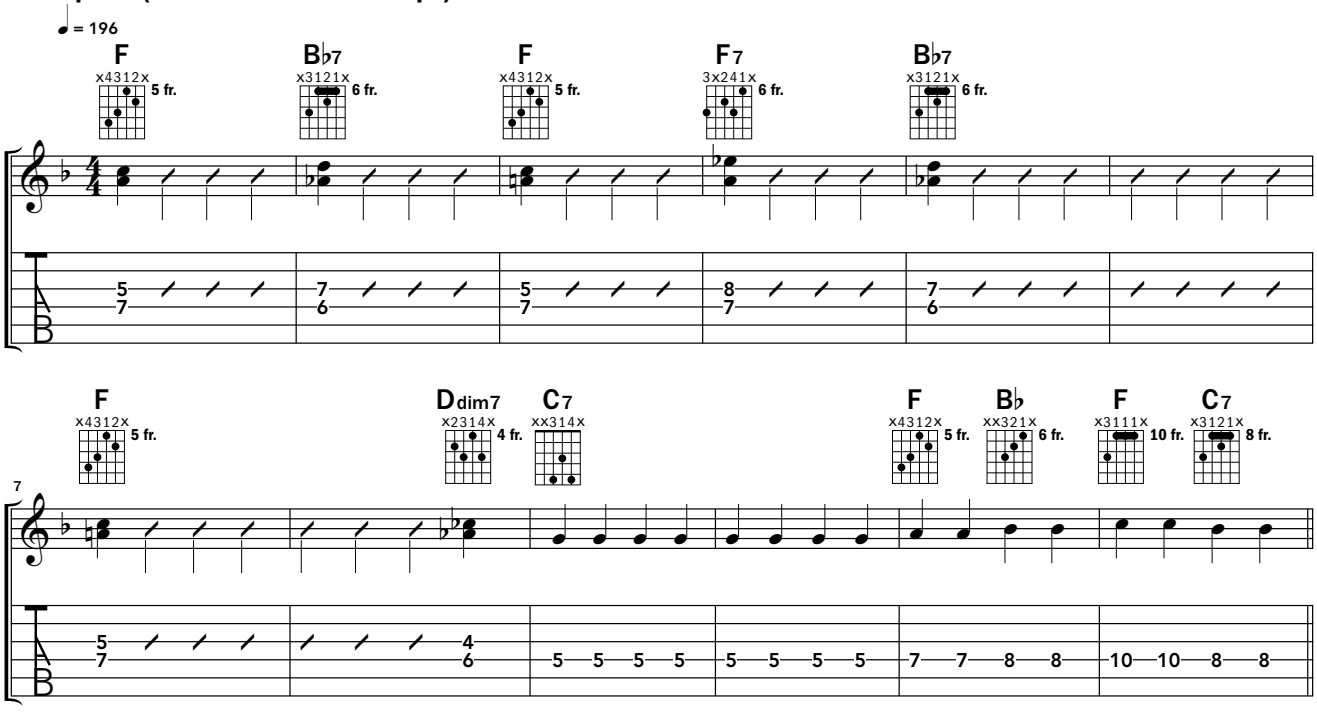
PARING THINGS DOWN

Throughout the 1940s, Green enjoyed extra work through small-group dates using key players from the Basie band. These occasions, with their less cluttered settings, allow the listener to get a better sense of what the guitarist was playing. A 1944 recording of "Ghost of a Chance" by the tenor saxophonist Lester Young has a great bridge (**Example 4**) in which Green's guitar is quite prominent.

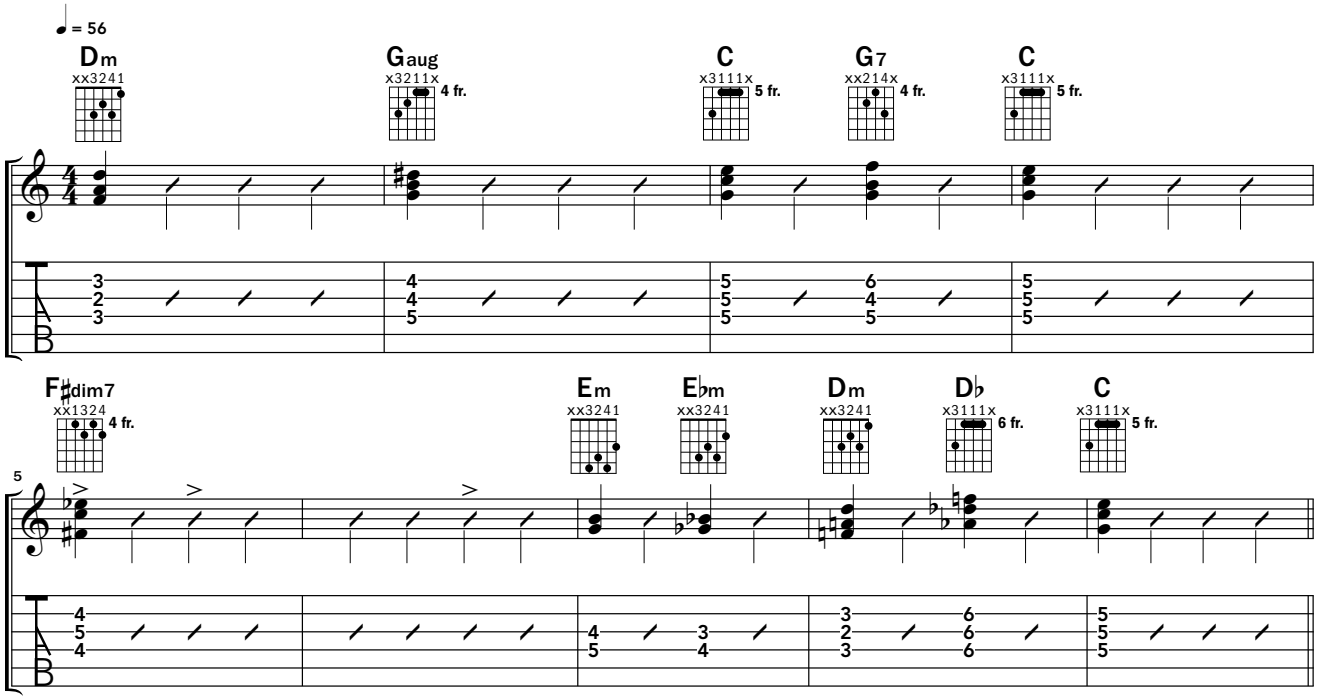
Green tends to emphasize just two or three notes of the fuller chord forms. In bars 5 and 6, instead of sliding the F♯dim7 chord in minor thirds, a common jazz-guitar move, he plays around with subtle accent shifts using the same chord shape. There is some intriguing chromatic movement in bar 7 (Em–E♭m) and then again in 8 (Dm– D♭), resolving to the top of the form in the final measure.

By the late 1940s, Green's two- and one-note chords dominated his playing, and Basie's 1947 recording of "Hey, Pretty Baby" typifies the guitarist's approach during this period.

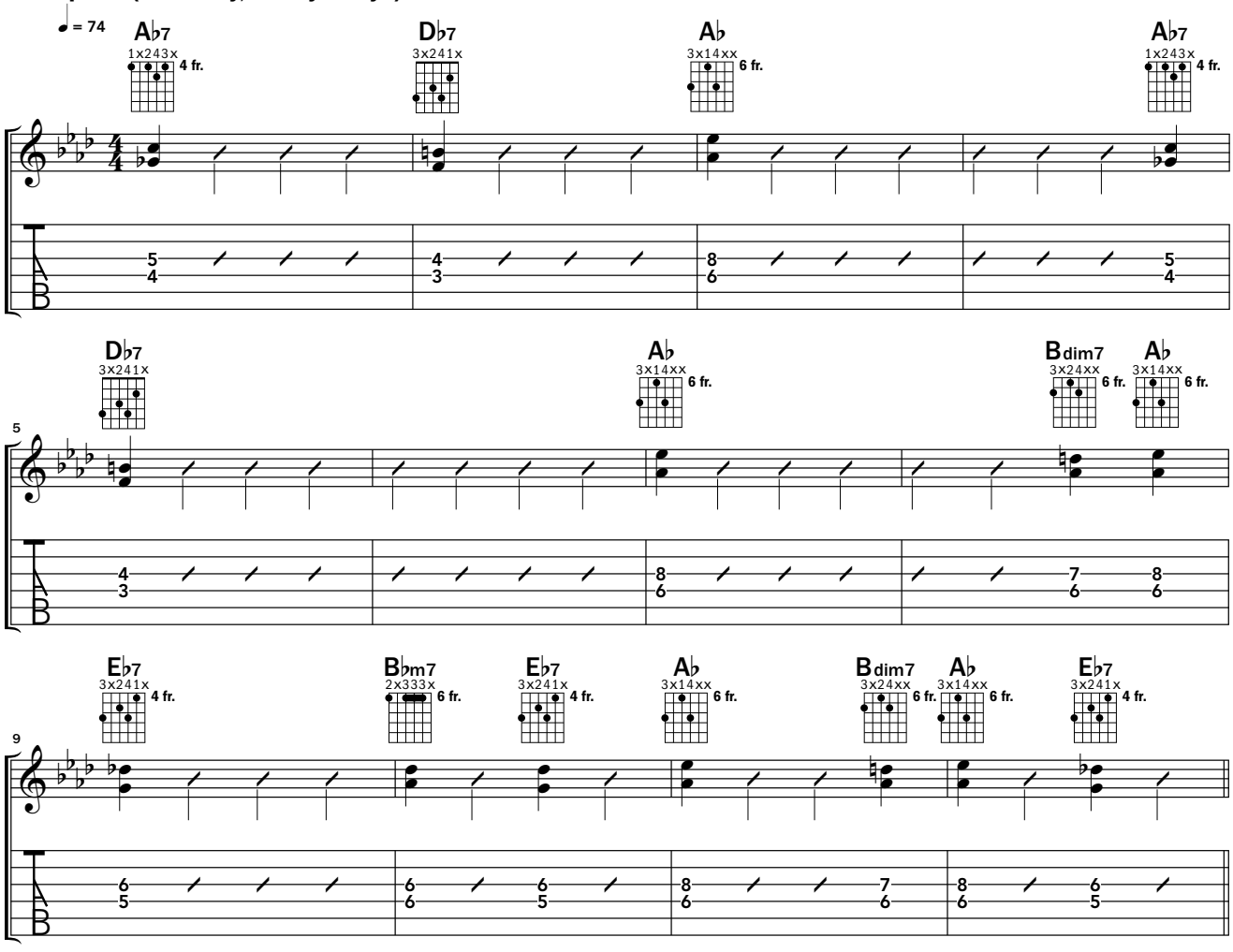
Example 3 (à la "One O'Clock Jump")



Example 4 (à la “Ghost of a Chance”)



Example 5 (à la “Hey, Pretty Baby”)



Green with Count Basie Orchestra musicians Jo Jones (drums) and Walter Page.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Example 5 focuses on the first chorus underneath the piano solo. Note the economy of motion in the first two bars—simply moving the two notes of the I chord (A♭7) down by one fret gets you the IV (D♭7).

In bar 3, Green mixes things up by using an inversion of the I chord, playing it as major, rather than a dominant seventh. This not only lends harmonic variety, it allows Green to maintain his focus on the D string. Take note of the diminished chords in bars 8 and 11, played on different beats each time.

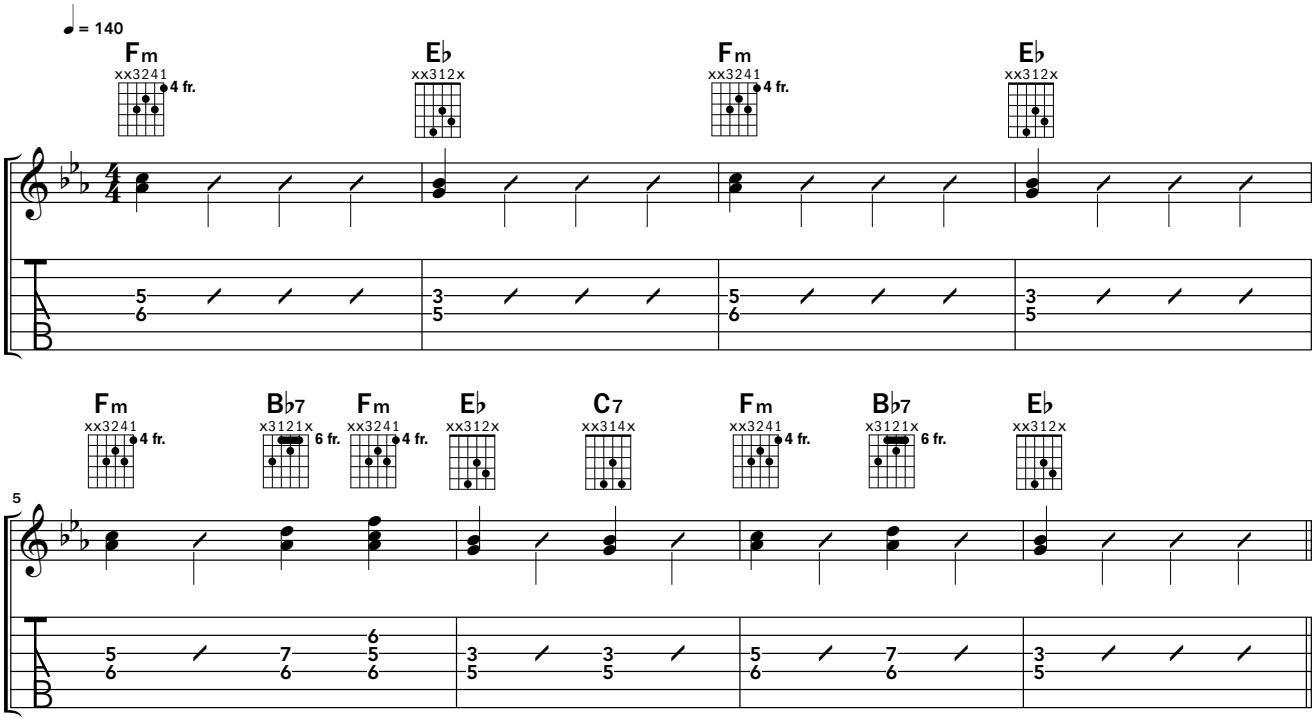
This figure makes for a great comparison to Ex. 1, as the two are close in tempo and feel but were recorded nearly a decade apart. By this time, Green's right-hand stroke was less of a strum and more of a gentle roll, somewhere between snapping the wrist and pushing the right hand slightly forward with the forearm.

I'll conclude with a stock chord progression found throughout the Great American Songbook—in this case in the bridge of Irving Berlin's "Cheek to Cheek," which the Basie orchestra recorded in the spring of 1949, less than nine months before the bandleader temporarily called it quits. Green can be heard occasionally peeking out from behind the bold arrangement, and his playing on the bridge a minute into the recording reveals the ideas used in **Example 6**. The movement from the ii chord (Fm) to the tonic (E♭) recalls the voice leading of Ex. 2. It's a simple but effective way to navigate changes that every jazz guitarist sees regularly, with a reminder in bar 5 that by continuing to employ full chord forms you can occasionally add some additional harmonic movement, even when primarily sounding two notes.

There is so much to be gleaned from these streamlined chords and Green's general concept of the guitar as a percussive timekeeping instrument capable of delivering as little or as much harmonic information as the playing situation demands. While the elements of this lesson are foundational for any jazz guitarist, Green's approach offers valuable takeaways for acoustic guitarists of all stripes. **AG**

Thanks to Alfred Green, Mark Cantor, James Chirillo, Michael Pettersen, Jim Speros, and Jonathan Stout.

Example 6 (à la "Cheek to Cheek")





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Bokyung Byun

MOLLY PAN

Charting Her Course

South Korean classical guitarist Bokyung Byun has enjoyed tremendous success since moving to the U.S.

BY MARK SMALL



South Korea–born classical virtuoso Bokyung Byun (aka "Bo") is riding a wave of musical achievements. After earning her bachelor's and master's degrees from Juilliard, doctorate from the University of Southern California, and winning some big competitions, Byun is now focused on launching her professional career. This is a destination she's moved toward steadily since making her stage debut at age 11.

Concert appearances and competition wins in Korea brought Byun recognition in her tender years. At 13, she traveled to the U.S. to participate in the junior division of the 2007 Guitar Foundation of America (GFA) International Youth Competition and netted the top prize. In 2018, she became the first woman to win the acclaimed JoAnn Falletta International Concerto Competition, and in 2021, she won the GFA International Concert Artist Competition. In addition to a cash award, the GFA first prize includes a year-long concert tour of the U.S. and Canada. Add to the list of accomplishments the recent release of her second album, *Bokyung Byun: Guitar Recital,* on the Naxos label.

Byun's journey with the guitar began very early. "My mother and I were folding laundry and watching TV and landed on a channel giving guitar lessons," she recalls. "I was about five or six at the time and asked my mother if I could play guitar. I had started on piano, but it wasn't really clicking with me. She wanted me to play some kind of music and was excited that I wanted to try something new."



MOLLY PAN

BROADENING HORIZONS

Byun began with classical guitar at the outset. Her family moved quite a bit, and a year after beginning lessons, she found herself in a new city with a different teacher. She credits both instructors with giving her a solid technical foundation. In a YouTube video, she appears as a prodigy with an impressive tremolo on Francisco Tárrega's "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" at age seven. Before becoming a teen, she went to China and spent two years at a boarding school for young guitarists. Her teacher there, Chen Zhi, routinely brought his students to the GFA competitions to meet people and compete. A prescient Zhi chose Byun to play in the aforementioned 2007 GFA competition in Los Angeles.

"I was surprised to win," she relates. "At that age, you have no way to gauge your level. I knew my playing was all right, but I didn't know where I was compared to the other kids. Winning was a nice validation." Afterwards, she returned to her home in Korea. Her parents were very supportive of her talent and ambitions, but as non-musicians, didn't know what her next step should be.

"My dad reached out to people everywhere to figure out the right path for me," she says. "He emailed links to videos of me to some of the big names in classical guitar. Many replied and were encouraging. Some said I should apply to the colleges where they taught. Bill Kanengiser of the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet said I should come over and he'd teach me. I had already taken the Korean equivalent of the G.E.D. and had my high school diploma, so I had that year to just do what I wanted. I moved to America when I was 15 without college plans. I lived with a host family and took lessons with Bill for a year. That gave me a chance to see what it was like to live in the U.S. and to learn English before going to college."

Byun's original idea was to attend USC, where Kanengiser is a faculty member, and continue studying with him. The woman in her host family encouraged her to also consider Juilliard. When Byun learned that Sharon Isbin was teaching there, she decided to apply to both USC and Juilliard. "I had listened to Sharon's CDs a lot back home and figured I should audition there," she says. "I really liked New York and wanted to try something different, so I ended up going to Juilliard in 2011."

Byun was just 16 when she entered the prestigious music school and ultimately stayed for five years, earning both her undergraduate and master's degrees under Isbin's tutelage. "I was still unaware of a lot of things when I started with her," Byun says. "She taught me about phrasing and how to make music. She is very meticulous about every phrase. I feel I owe everything I do now to her and really appreciate all I learned from her."

Byun followed up with doctoral studies at USC with Kanengiser's LAGQ colleague Scott Tennant. His approach was to present the big picture of guitar playing and help her learn to trust her musical instincts. "I'd ask Scott if what I was doing was right and he would say, 'Well, if it sounds right, then it's right!'"

She feels fortunate to have had these renowned teachers in the right sequence, crediting Kanengiser for getting her to engage more deeply in music, Isbin for guidance on musicality, and Tennant for helping her develop a healthy outlook as a musician.

THE COMPETITIVE LIFE

In interviews before her wins at the 2018 Falletta and 2021 GFA competitions, Byun expressed that she was trying to get back to the feelings she had at her earliest competitions. "I was stressed out doing competitions during my college years," she says. "I realized that I had so much more fun in the GFA youth competition because I just wanted to show what I had practiced for the whole year. So I changed my mindset and that made competitions more enjoyable for me. As I saw it, all the players probably deserved to win; it's just what would happen that day or what the judges liked more that day. You just do your best and the rest is up to chance."

Preparing the set repertoire for any competition dictates what the players need to work on the preceding year. Additionally, the selections each player chooses to show their musical personality must be technically demanding enough to impress the judges. Byun found herself putting away pieces she really wanted to learn that would not be advantageous to play in a competition.

After winning several international contests, Byun has made the decision not to compete anymore. "I won two major competitions and the reason for doing them was to get some exposure, she says. "Now that I've done that, I want to leave the scene and focus on what I will to do as a musician."

The repertoire any performer chooses for concerts and recordings helps to define their artistic identity. "I like music from all periods, but my jam is mostly 20th- and 21st-century music," Byun says. "When I was younger, I played a lot of music by Sor and Giuliani from the classical period. I'm probably rebelling against that now by feeling I've had enough of it, but I'm sure I'll come back to it in a few years."

She has a fondness for the music English guitar legend Julian Bream introduced to the world and so has played Benjamin Britten's challenging *Nocturnal* and William Walton's *Five Bagatelles*. She also enjoys the Segovia repertoire. Onstage, on video, and on record, she generally champions works of recent vintage. Her latest album features Celil Refik Kaya's *Guitar Sonata No. 1 in D Major* (2017), João Luiz's "Prelude No. 4" (2018), Angel Lam's *Little Snow* (2021), and Claire Assad's "The Last Song" (2010). She also included 20th-century works by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Manuel Ponce, and Baroque-era composer Carlos de Seixas.

BEST PRACTICES

Byun currently lives in Los Angeles, and in May of 2022, she accepted a faculty post at California State University, Fullerton. She shares hard-won advice on practicing with her students, stressing that they not create a daily routine of practicing for a predetermined number of hours. She knows that playing for long stretches without a break can be harmful and instead encourages musical rather than hourly goals. "I had an injury when I was younger and had to stop playing the guitar for a month," she says. "That scared me, so now I will play for an hour with musical goals in mind, then I take a break for about a half hour before going back to practice more. Depending on my workload, I will do three to four short sessions a day."

Many of the musical goals she sets entail identifying and isolating problem passages in the pieces she's learning. She first searches for the optimal fingering and then works the passage slowly, steadily bringing the music up to tempo in subsequent practice sessions. "I look at a problem. If it's a scale, I figure out if the trouble is in the right or left hand or in the way I am thinking about it. Half of the time I find I'm making something harder than it should be."

Around her teaching schedule, Byun is traveling to fulfill the bookings of her GFA tour and getting a taste of the touring life. "I used to have concerts here and there, but it seems like I have a concert every weekend now," she says enthusiastically. "I've never had a full year of concerts on the road. This feels very real and I am excited to see how I will handle it." Like many traveling musicians, she loves the time onstage and visiting new places, but finds getting her guitar onboard an airplane can be a bear.

With her formal education and competition days behind her, Byun is charting a course toward a musical career encompassing performing, teaching, and more. "I am trying to think more broadly now," she says. "During the pandemic I felt a little useless as a guitarist. I feel now that I want to give back to society in some way. I'm not sure how I will achieve that with the guitar, but we'll see." As she has done throughout her life, Byun will rise to the challenge and figure this out too. AG

To discover ten more rising stars of classical guitar, go to acousticguitar.com/10risingstars.



CHOO SANGYEON STUDIO

WHAT BOKYUNG BYUN PLAYS

Byun plays a 2019 Dieter Müller cedar top with Brazilian rosewood back and sides and a 640mm scale length. She uses Augustine Paragon Blue high-tension strings.







Clockwise from top left: Martin Modern Deluxe D-45, Martin Modern Deluxe 00-12 28, Luna Vineyard Koa Bevel Folk

2022 THE YEAR IN GEAR

DESPITE UNCERTAIN TIMES, MAKERS UNVEIL GUITARS, GUITARS, AND MORE GUITARS

BY GREG OLWELL AND ADAM PERLMUTTER

With many venues reopening after two years of hibernation and the return of playing opportunities, there's been a feeling of exhilaration around live music. From gigs at cafes and places of worship to big tours, musicians are back out there, singing songs and playing guitar with fresh zeal. Excitement remains exceptionally high for acoustic guitars, and manufacturers are challenged to meet demand, even years after production shutdowns.

Whether at a large music retailer or a small boutique, the shorthand explanation for the occasional difficulty in finding a new guitar (and a *bonkers* used market) is "supply chain." But rising material costs and shortages of components aren't dampening the powerful desire to play. Through it all, makers continue to produce exciting instruments at every price. And players seem to be grabbing them. There have been many more new gear releases in the past 12 months than we can cover comprehensively, so we'll focus on some of this year's highlights, grouped into several noteworthy trends.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS







Clockwise from top left: Takamine CRN-TS1, Taylor American Dream AD27e Flametop, Eastman E20OOSS/v

HIGH-END TOUCHES AT ALL PRICE POINTS

For the last several years, **C.F. Martin & Co.** has been adding instruments to its Modern Deluxe series, updating classic designs by merging vintage-approved specs—like torrefied soundboards and dovetail neck joints secured with natural protein glue—with state-of-the-art details such as Liquidmetal bridge pins and carbon fiber bridge plates.

Last year saw the introduction of a handful of new models in this series, including the most opulent member yet, the **Modern Deluxe D-45** ($10,499 street), with its European flamed maple binding and extensive inlay work, including an intricate classic torch design on the headstock. While we were taken as much with the guitar's sound and feel as its appearance and build quality, we were similarly wowed by the **Modern Deluxe 012-28**, with a much less eye-popping price tag of $4,399.

At the same time, some relatively inexpensive guitars have been receiving the sort of primo specs and appointments that were not too long ago seen only on high-end instruments, and 2022 proved no exception to this encouraging trend. *AG* got its hands on two excellent, vintage-inspired examples with decidedly different voices but similarly good designs and execution.

A slope-shouldered dreadnought is a thing of beauty, and with a thermo-cured spruce top on a sapele body, onboard electronics, and a stylish slotted headstock, the 12-fret **Takamine CRN-TS1** ($1,849) has a big sound to match its vintage look. On the other hand, an L-00-sized guitar is hard to beat for its balance of comfort and tone, and we thought that the **Eastman E20OOSS/v** ($1,869), with its varnish finish—a tone-enhancing option seldom seen these days on production guitars—and Adirondack spruce top delivered the sweetness and vintage warmth that fingerstylists and flatpickers crave from these 14-fretters.

Even more affordable, **Luna's Vineyard Koa Bevel Folk** ($699) boasts a comfortable, compact body, somewhere between a grand auditorium and parlor in size, with an ergonomic bevel on the lower bass bout. This distinctive-looking guitar boasts elaborate vine inlays on its rosewood fretboard, starting at the first fret and extending into the rosette—not the sort of high-end detailing that you would expect on a guitar at this price point. More important, it boasts a versatile voice and smooth playability.

ALTERNATIVE TONEWOODS

The guitar industry has for years been facing dwindling supplies of precious tonewoods; rosewood, mahogany, and ebony are becoming more difficult to source at high quality and in abundant quantities. Guitar makers like **Taylor**—which has gone as far as to purchase a legal ebony mill in Cameroon, and participate in initiatives to reforest koa in Hawaii, among many other positive endeavors—have been putting much thought and energy into using sustainable tonewoods while also working with good alternatives.

Maple grows abundantly and sustainably in North America. It's not exactly a rarity on an acoustic guitar, but when was the last time you saw an acoustic with a maple top, back,






Clockwise from top left: Luna Bamboo Parlor, Córdoba Stage, Ibanez Tim Henson TOD10N Signature, Collings 003 14-Fret with reclaimed Sitka spruce top

and sides? With the **American Dream AD27e Flametop** ($2,199), a member of Taylor's affordable new series made at its California shop, the maker did just that, and we were impressed by the guitar's midrange and high-end response and inspiring amplified sounds.

A couple of years ago, Taylor made a splash by beginning to use urban ash—wood salvaged from municipalities in Southern California—in select models. (See "Taylor Guitars Discovers a New Sustainable Tonewood in Its Own Backyard" at AcousticGuitar.com.) Now the company is featuring urban ironbark—a hardwood from the eucalyptus family described as being somewhat like rosewood and ebony—in its formerly all-mahogany 500 series. At the same time, Taylor began using its well-sourced koa for the 700 series, including the new 724ce, which we found to have a warm and balanced sound, with a lacy high-end sweetness.

Bamboo is a fast-growing and renewable evergreen plant known for its incredible diversity, used for everything from construction to food to fuel. You might have items like bamboo cutting boards and drawer organizers in your home, but it's not the sort of material you'd expect to find in a guitar. Luna, however, introduced the **Bamboo Parlor** ($299), a neat acoustic-electric with a 25-inch scale length and a laser-etched leaf pattern around its soundhole.

Other builders rolled out guitars made from more traditional, reclaimed tonewoods. **Collings Guitars**, for instance, has been making the occasional flattop using a small stash of Sitka spruce from an Alaskan logging camp. Having spent decades under water, the wood has taken on a striking blueish-gray tint, and some of the boards have dramatic bear-claw figuring, making for a showstopper of a guitar. Around press time, Collings unveiled a beautifully matched pair of a **003 14-Fret** and **I-35 LC Deluxe** (thinline electric), both made with similarly distinctive-looking spruce salvaged from a bridge in Canada.

UNIQUE ACOUSTIC-ELECTRICS

A couple of new offerings show that the nylon-string acoustic is anything but a staid—and expensive—instrument exclusively for classical players. At $699, the **Córdoba Stage** is the company's first nylon-string electric, and its thin body helps deliver plugged-in nylon-string tone without high-volume feedback. Similarly, the **Ibanez Tim Henson TOD10N Signature** ($699.99) is a thinline acoustic-electric with a fan-braced solid Sitka spruce top and a Fishman Sonicore pickup. Both guitars grant guitarists access to warm nylon-string tones at affordable price points, with necks that will feel more familiar to steel-string and electric players than those on traditional classical guitars.

Like all **PRS** acoustics, one of the latest editions to the Angelus series, the **SE A20E** ($699; see review on page 78), incorporates a bracing pattern that is a hybrid of the traditional fan bracing seen on classical guitars and the classic X pattern common to steel-strings. This all-mahogany cutaway acoustic-electric impressed us with its sleek playability, adaptable voice, and excellent amplified sound, thanks in part to its PRS-voiced Fishman Sonitone electronics.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS









Clockwise from top left: Fender Acoustasonic Player Jazzmaster, Martin 000-16 StreetMaster, Gibson Faded Series Hummingbird, J-45 '50s, and J-35 '30s, Taylor GT611e

In an altogether different direction, **Fender** introduced its evolutionary Acoustasonic series of hybrid acoustic-electrics in 2019, beginning with a Telecaster version (reviewed in the May/June 2019 issue). In 2022, the company added production of the line at a new plant in Ensenada, Mexico, and is now able to offer a lower entry price for the **Acoustasonic Player Jazzmaster** ($1,199) and the **Acoustasonic Player Telecaster** ($1,049).

For its part, Martin flipped the script with a new U.S.-made version of its hotly received, stage-ready SC series of guitars, with their sleek cutaways and fast necks. (See a review of the SC-13E in the July/August 2020 issue.) The **CS-SC-2022** ($7,999) is a high-end version of the offset cutaway SC, made at Martin's Nazareth, Pennsylvania, factory, and features an East Indian rosewood back and sides, a VTS (torrefied) Sitka spruce top, and elaborate fingerboard and headstock inlays.

With a smaller, more accessible cutaway GT (Grand Theater) shape, the Taylor **GT 611e LTD** ($3,499) pairs a Sitka spruce soundboard with big-leaf maple back and sides and a hard-rock maple neck. Built with the company's recent C-Class bracing, the GT 611e LTD has clarity and projection to spare, and the guitar's Expression System 2 electronics give it an excellent amplified sound.

DISTRESSED, FADED, AND BROKEN-IN

There are only so many vibe-filled old guitars to go around, and many players are drawn to the old and broken-in look, so some makers have been offering faded or distressed finishes. For instance, Pre-War Guitars offers four different levels of aging on its tradition-inspired flattops, the highest of which simulates decades of heavy play wear and looks just like the real deal.

Though you would have been lucky to get your hands on a new Waterloo in 2022, due to extremely limited production, the guitars had a lightly distressed option for their satin nitrocellulose lacquer finishes. Martin has also applied a similar treatment to some examples in its Authentic line of reissues based on golden-era designs.

Martin debuted its StreetMaster look on the all-mahogany 15 Series in 2017 and last year applied the well-loved-looking finish to the **000-16 StreetMaster** ($1,999), boasting an Adirondack spruce top (normally found on more expensive Martins) and East Indian rosewood back and sides, with Golden Age Relic nickel tuners completing the aged effect.

At the same time, Gibson reintroduced its Faded Finish series with a trio of acoustics having satin nitrocellulose finishes meant to mimic age—and coming complete with L.R. Baggs VTC electronics, for modern plug-in-and-play convenience. The lineup includes the **Hummingbird Faded Natural** ($3,499), **J-45 '50s Faded Sunburst** ($2,499), and a **J-35 '30s Faded Natural** ($2,199), all looking subtly and tastefully aged.

COOL SIGNATURE GUITARS

Ever since Gibson introduced its first Nick Lucas model in the late 1920s, guitar makers have tempted buyers with artist-signature models. The legacy company introduced a






Clockwise from top left: Pre-War Norman Blake Collection, Martin 000JR-10E Shawn Mendes Custom, Guild A-20 Marley, Gibson Dave Mustaine Songwriter

whole bunch of signature models in 2022, including the **Cat Stevens J-180** ($7,499); the **Everly Brothers SJ-200** ($7,999); and not one but two Elvis Presley models, the **Elvis SJ-200** ($5,299) and the **Elvis Dove** ($4,699).

While Dave Mustaine, the leader and rhythm guitarist of the thrash metal band Megadeth, isn't exactly known for his sensitive fingerpicking, Gibson celebrated him with the all-black **Dave Mustaine Songwriter** ($4,499/$4,999 signed). Similarly, Jerry Cantrell, the lead guitarist of the heavy metal outfit Alice in Chains, received a pair of signature models, the **"Fire Devil" Songwriter** ($3,999) and **"Atone" Songwriter** ($3,799), naturally both black as well.

Taking a subtler approach, Martin unveiled several interesting signature models. The **Rich Robinson Custom Signature Edition D-28** ($6,999) is a careful replica, nicks and all, of the Black Crowes guitarist's personal 1954 D-28, handed down from his musician father, who had played it on the Grand Ole Opry. The younger Robinson used the original guitar in writing many of the songs for the Black Crowes' studio albums, so the signature model will obviously hold special appeal for fans.

The **Custom Major Kealakai** ($7,999) extra-large jumbo brings attention to a dreadnought precursor Martin made specially in 1916 for the conductor and musician in the Royal Hawaiian Band. Featuring a 12-fret body that is larger, deeper, and wider than a 000, the Major Kealakai has a unique oversized bridge on its VTS Adirondack spruce top. The back and sides are made from sinker mahogany, a good example of the use of salvaged woods these days.

Martin's small-bodied **000JR-10E Shawn Mendes Custom Artist Edition** ($799) has a 24-inch scale fretboard and is made entirely with FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) sustainable tonewoods, Sitka spruce and sapele. This handsome guitar includes other unique touches, such as a laser-engraved swallow on the bridge and hidden song lyrics engraved inside the box.

When it comes to flatpickers, there is hardly a player more revered than Norman Blake. **Pre-War Guitars** has celebrated the living legend with a limited run of 12 guitars patterned after his personal 1934 converted Hawaiian dreadnought and 1933 shade-top herringbone dread—and built with his input. The **Norman Blake Collection** of six mahogany and six Brazilian rosewood 12-fret dreadnoughts, priced at $19,995 and $24,995, respectively, feature hot hide glue construction and an ebony reinforcement bar instead of a truss rod and bar frets. These guitars come with the disclaimer that because the neck relief is not adjustable, it would behoove the owner to have saddles of different heights, to compensate for the wood moving around in different climates.

At the opposite end of the price spectrum, the **Guild A-20 Marley** ($399) is inspired by the Madeira dreadnought that the late reggae superstar Bob Marley used in writing songs at home. The A-20 Marley pairs a solid spruce top with a laminated mahogany body and comes complete with neat accessories like a booklet detailing the guitar's making and a poster of Marley with his original Madeira—yet another reminder of just how much of a fun guitar you can get for the money these days. AG

NORMAN BLAKE PHOTO BY DUSTIN MILLER; SHAWN MENDES PHOTO BY MIRANDA MCDONALD; PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS



Clockwise from top left: Schertler Giulia X amp, D'Addario Nexxus 360 rechargeable clip-on tuner, Nux Stageman II AC-80 amp, Paige PaigePro PP-6-ETI capo, Dunlop Rev Willie's Sangria Slides and Trigger Fly capo, VHT True Acoustic 60 amp

SMART NEW AMPS AND ACCESSORIES

While 2022 saw a great abundance of new guitars at all price points, we also saw some smart new amps and accessories. At $449, the **VHT True Acoustic 60** is a portable powerhouse that we praised for its volume and tone while being a tremendous dual-purpose amp for guitar and voice at an affordable price. Likewise, the 70-watt **Schertler Giulia X** ($1,188) gives dual mic and instrument inputs, high-end components, chic styling, and stained wood cabinetry. With 80 watts on tap, looping, Bluetooth, and a battery capable of four hours of playtime, the **Nux Stageman II AC-80** ($449) is compact and ready for playing anywhere.

The handsome stainless steel **Paige PaigePro PP-6-ETI capo** ($230) is a marvel of craft, with six individually adjustable inserts of a nut-like material for a precision fit. Slide fans should check out the new trio of colored glass **Dunlop Rev Willie's Sangria Slides** ($19.99 each), available in several colors and shapes, while the **Dunlop Trigger Fly capos** ($19.99) streamline their bestselling Fly capos. Clip-on tuners are ubiquitous, and the new **D'Addario Nexxus 360 rechargeable clip-on tuner** ($29.99) combines a bright display with a rechargeable onboard battery. *—GO*

Paul Mehling



JOEY LUSTERMAN

HERE'S HOW

Getting Warmer

Add these fretboard calisthenics to the beginning of your practice routine

BY PAUL MEHLING

Most guitarists have received plenty of reminders about warming up, but many choose to skip this important step and dive right into playing. That's a shame, because however tedious or boring they might seem to be, warm-up exercises are great for strengthening fingers, increasing speed, and improving synchronization between the left and right hands. In this lesson, I'll present a few great exercises that have helped me progress and stay in shape on the fretboard in my many years of playing and teaching.

I recommend working through this series of exercises slowly, for about five to ten minutes minimum at the beginning of each practice session. Focus on one exercise for at least a week at a time, gradually adding the subsequent exercises to your daily routine. As with everything, the results may not be apparent immediately, but if you work on these warm-ups daily, you will likely begin to see progress in a week or less.

1 GET STARTED

Every journey begins with a single step—in the case of these exercises, a half step, or the distance of one fret. Start by setting your metronome to a slow tempo, around 60 bpm. (More advanced players use a faster setting.) In **Example 1a**, play the notes B and C on string 3 with your first and second fingers, respectively. Use all downstrokes, for a strong, pure sound. (Fingerstyle players can use one finger at first, then each subsequent finger, one at a time.)

As with any physical exercise, repetition is key for building accuracy, strength, and confidence. Play this pattern four times, striving to make both notes sound the same in terms of intensity, clarity, and volume. Then do the same thing on the B string (**Example 1b**), as well as the other four strings. Something to keep in mind is that the goal here is near-perfection—otherwise, you're just practicing mistakes.

2 ADD HAMMER-ONS AND SLIDES

The next exercise is the same as the previous one but adds hammer-ons. Controlling the burst of energy needed to make each hammered-on note match the tone and volume of the preceding picked note is the entire point of this variation. If this warm-up feels challenging, just take it slowly at first.

As before, start on the G string (**Example 2a**), repeating it four times before doing the

same thing on the B string (**Example 2b**) as well as the remaining four strings. For an added challenge, advanced players might want to do eight repetitions of each measure, rather than four.

After you've done the warm-ups with hammer-ons, try them with legato slides, as shown in **Examples 3a–b**, sounding each higher note by moving into it from a half step below, without lifting the fretting finger off the string. As with hammer-ons, the goal is to keep all the notes sounding as similar as possible in terms of tone and dynamics. This will help to develop finger strength and accuracy as well as build up—or maintain—those much-needed callouses!
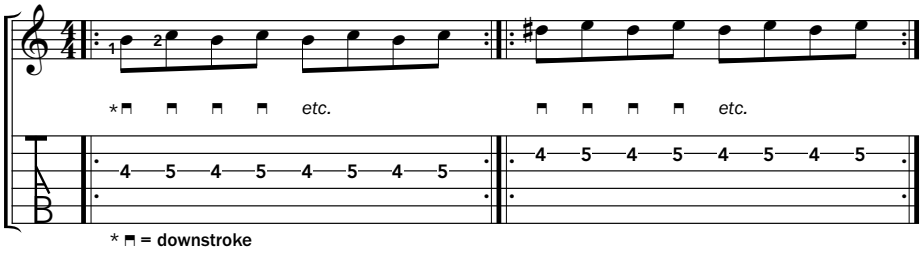
3 REVIEW AND REGROUP

After a month or so, try the warm-ups in the first two steps first with your second and third fingers and then your third and fourth. Likewise, practice the sliding exercise with each of your other fretting fingers. You can also up the ante by using alternate picking, or, if you're a fingerpicker, trying different two-finger combinations (e.g., index and middle, or middle and ring, on the lower and higher notes, respectively).

You'll also want to move the warm-ups up and down the fretboard. Some strings and positions might be easier for you than others—don't shy away from the difficult areas, as that will hinder your connection to your guitar. Keep at these exercises thoroughly and regularly and you'll be improving the relationship between your left and right hands—not to mention your overall guitar technique—without even thinking about it! **AG**

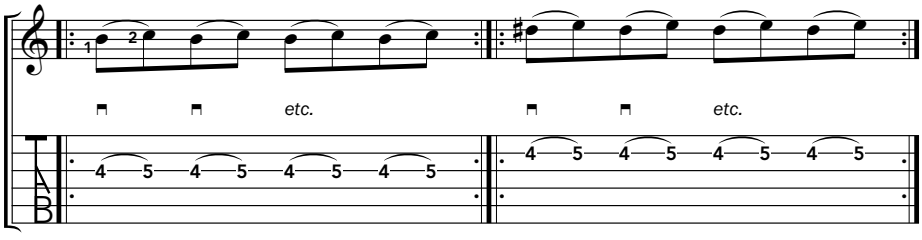
Paul Mehling, founder of the Hot Club of San Francisco, is a Gypsy-jazz devotee, teacher, and writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. hotclubsf.com/players

Example 1a



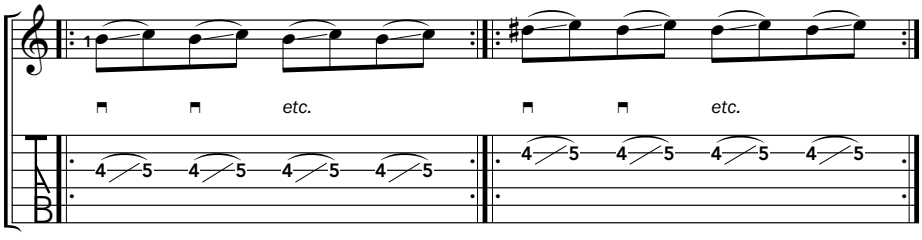
Example 1b

Example 2a



Example 2b

Example 3a



Example 3b

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David Hamburger



SARAH BORK HAMILTON

Let Your Fingers Do the Walking

Add some swing and sass to your fingerstyle blues with walking bass lines

BY DAVID HAMBURGER

The first time someone showed me how to play a self-accompanied blues by holding down a steady bass with my thumb and adding in licks on top with my fingers, I was pretty sure I had discovered the best possible way to spend my college years—until I noticed how solo jazz and blues pianists could do the same thing, only with walking bass lines.

When I began figuring out a way to hold down a bass line on the low strings while playing those same blues licks on top, I quickly discovered three things: First, it doesn't take any more fretting-hand coordination to play a walking bass than it does to play a steady-bass drone on a single note. Second, walking the bass while soloing is like swinging two baseball bats in the on-deck circle; after playing some walking moves, steady bass feels a lot easier. And third, walking bass sounds extremely cool, whether you use it for a whole tune, or just as a way to add some transitions to an otherwise steady bass groove.

In this lesson, you're going to take the classic back-porch sound uptown a little and play a 12-bar walking-bass blues in the key of E major. You'll learn to do this by playing a one-measure walking-bass line that works over an E7 chord, transposing it to A7 and B7, and coordinating a few simple two-note licks over those bass lines.

GO FOR A WALK

If you can thump out steady quarter notes on the sixth string, as in **Example 1**, just keep your thumb going the same way while adding in the three new fretted notes shown in **Example 2**. Next, take this steady, climbing figure (which we'll use throughout this lesson) and play a short, two-note blues lick on the first string at the same time. First, try the blues lick shown in **Example 3**, based on the I chord (E7) in E, on its own. Then, see what it feels like to play the lick with just the first note of the bass line (**Example 4**). You're going to pinch (play at the same time) the open sixth string and the third fret, first string, then follow up with the open first string on its own.

Once this feels comfortable, do the same move, but continue on with the next three notes of the bass line, as depicted in **Example 5**. Changing just the first note of Ex. 3 from the first string to the second string makes for the two-note lick in **Example 6**. Try playing those notes together with the open sixth string, as in **Example 7**, then following up with the rest of the bass line (**Example 8**). In a 12-bar, steady-bass blues, you could use a move like this in the fourth measure to make the transition from E7 to A7.

By moving the line in Ex. 2 over one string, you get a bass line that fits an A7 chord (the IV in E), as shown in **Example 9**. Taking the first blues lick and playing it over the new A bass line gives you **Example 10**. Moving on to the B7 (V) chord, things get a little more interesting. There isn't an open string to start the bass line on, so **Example 11** shows how to get the same line over a B7 chord by using a combination of fretted and open notes on strings 5 and 4.

Change things up a little for the lick over the B7 chord, starting on the second fret of the first string and going to the open second string, as shown in **Example 12**. Playing the B bass line and B lick together means fretting two notes at the beginning of the measure. Practice making the pinch with just the lick and the first bass note, like in **Example 13**, before adding in the rest of the bass line (**Example 14**). On a steady-bass blues, you could put Exs. 8 and 14 together to make a two-bar turnaround that fits over measures 11 and 12 of the classic 12-bar form.

PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

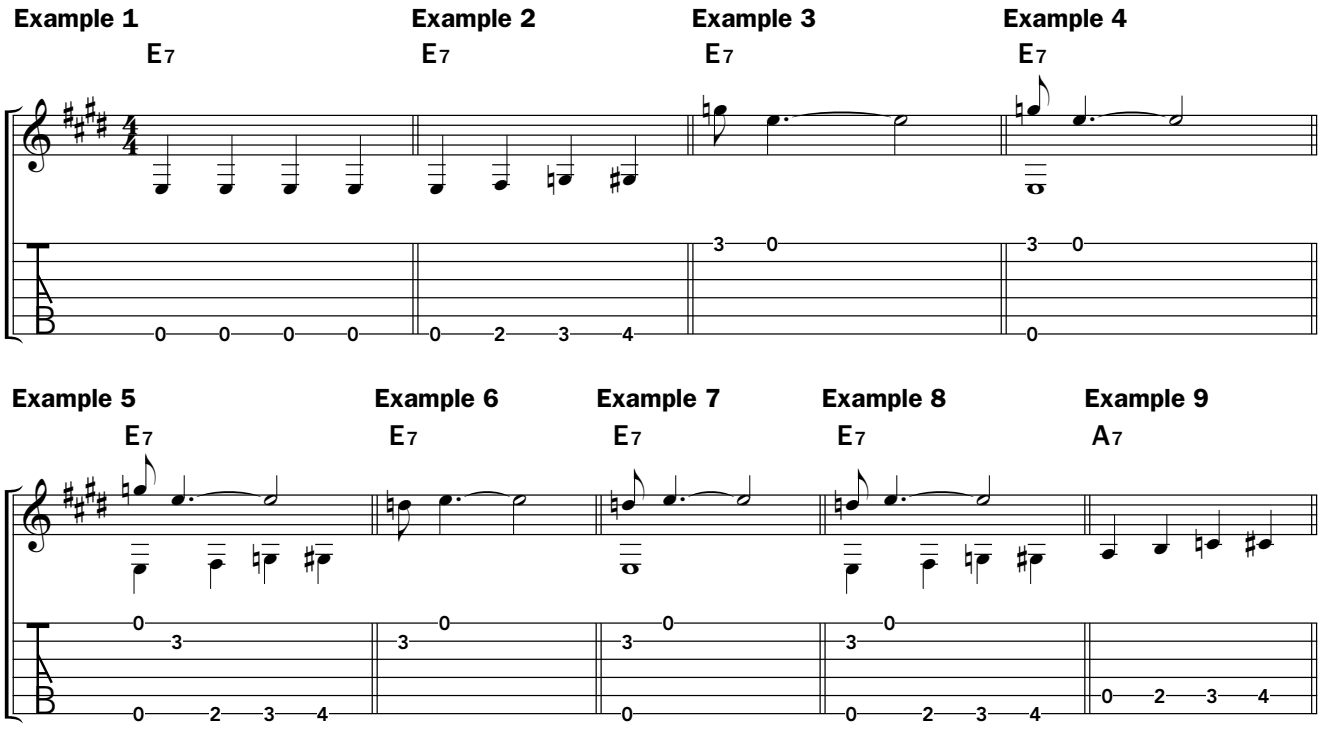
Now you're ready to assemble all of this into a full 12-bar blues in E. "Walk Me, Baby" (**Example 15**) plugs one of our one-measure bass-line/blues lick moves into each measure of the progression, until the last two measures.

Measures 11 and 12 include a slightly trickier turnaround, negotiating the move from E7 up to B7, then walking back down to set up the start of the next pass through the progression.

Look at just the bass line first, and play through it a few times on its own, then try just the melody on its own. When both feel somewhat familiar, go through measures 11 and 12 beat by beat, looking for moments when you pinch a bass and a melody note together, and moments in between when you have to play just a melody note.

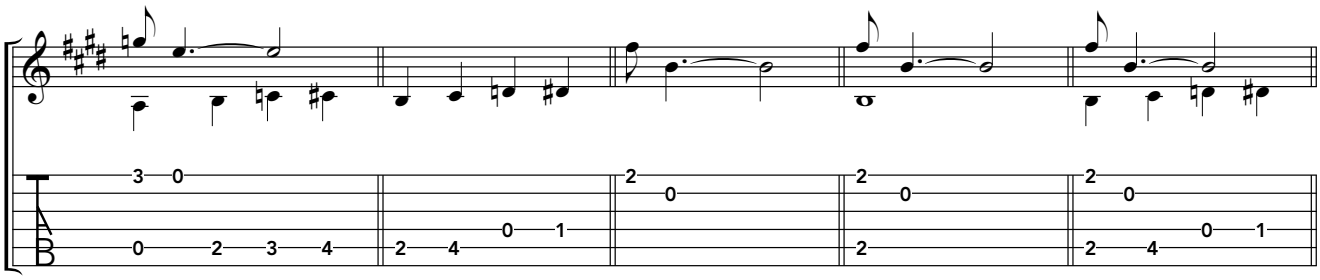
Once you've got this basic coordination under your fingers, you can experiment with placing different licks over this bass line—try using notes from the E minor pentatonic scale (E G A B D) for starters—or even changing up the bass lines themselves. Listen to the bass-guitar lines on electric blues albums to get some good ideas. Good luck, and keep it funky! AG

For more lessons by David Hamburger, see Country Blues Guitar Basics, *available at store.acousticguitar.com.*


Example 1
E7
Example 2
E7
Example 3
E7
Example 4
E7
Example 5
E7
Example 6
E7
Example 7
E7
Example 8
E7
Example 9
A7


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Example 10



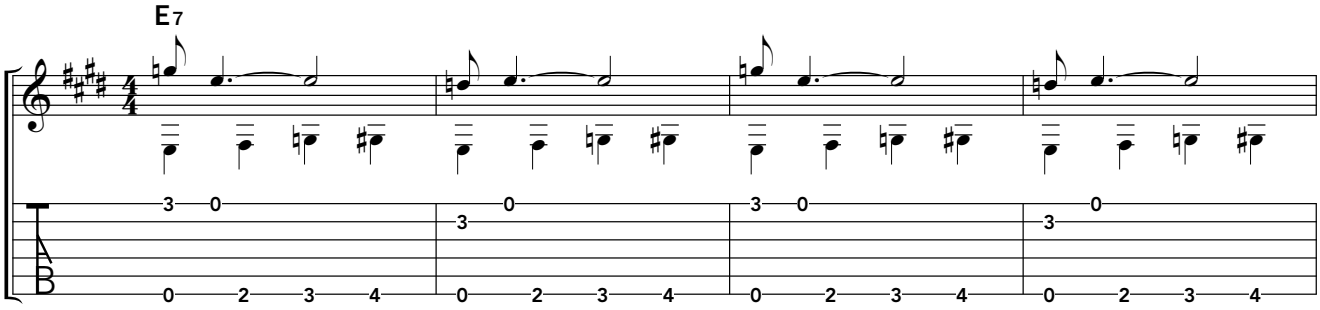
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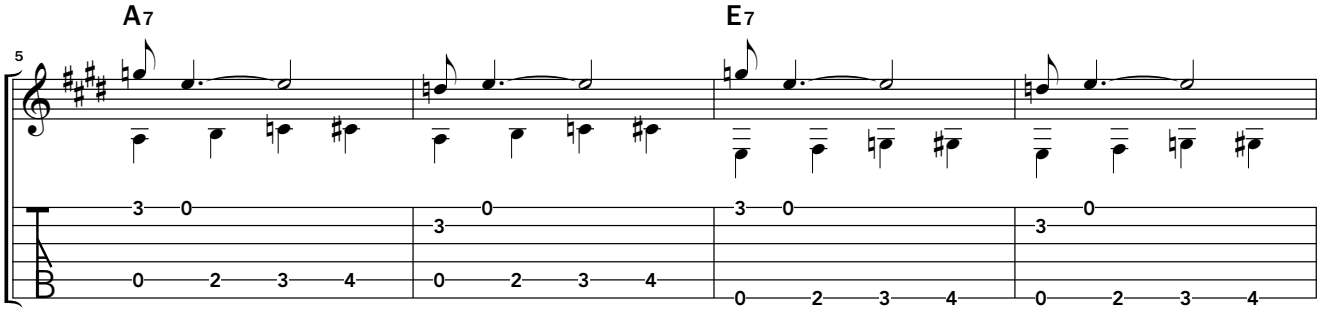
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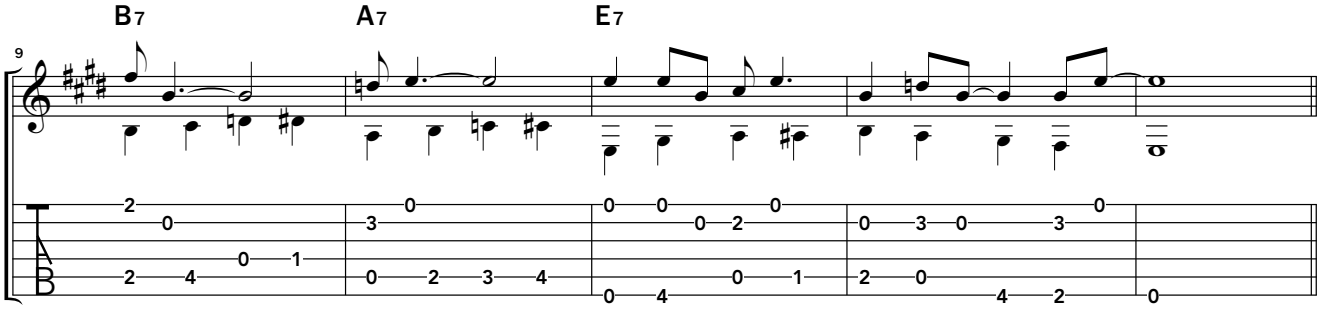
Example 13

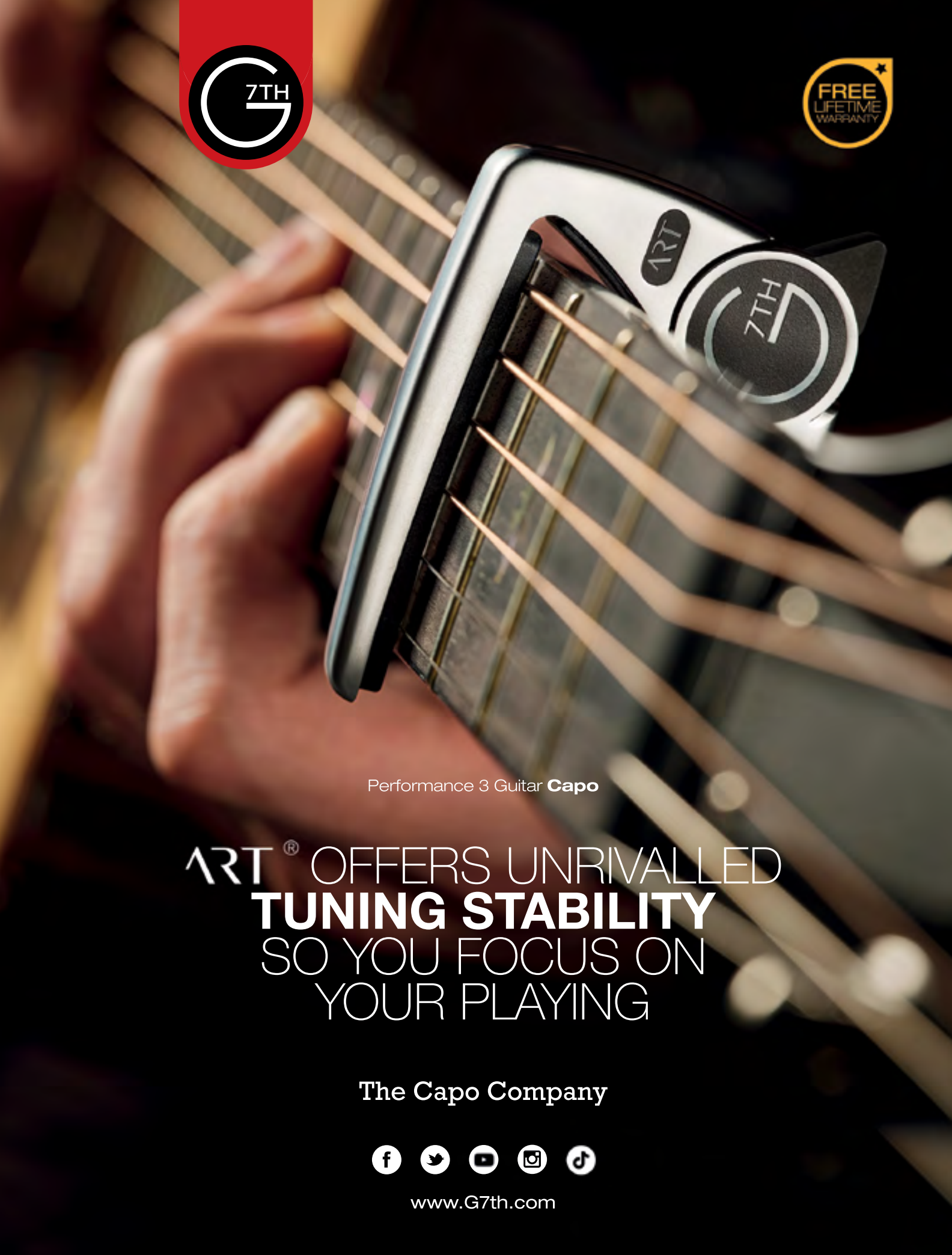
Example 14

Example 15
"Walk Me, Baby"








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ZAFER ERDOGAN

Boom-Chuck

Learn this essential strumming pattern heard throughout American roots music

BY CATHY FINK

THE PROBLEM:

You have become proficient with rudimentary strumming patterns but are becoming bored with them.

THE SOLUTION:

Break down the classic boom-chuck pattern and begin to use it on songs.

1 LEARN THE BASIC PATTERNS

If you have been following this series, you have learned how to use the flatpick for a whole bunch of different strums. In this lesson, you'll start adding individual bass notes to get the boom-chuck sound heard in classic country, bluegrass, and folk music, which will help add variety to your strumming.

Start by holding down a C chord and picking just the root note—the C on string 5, fret 3. Use a downward motion, with your picking hand coming out just a little bit after sounding the note. Next, alternate between that single C note on beats 1 and 3, and downward chord strums on the upper strings on 2 and 4, as shown in **Example 1a**.

To make things a little more interesting, switch between the root and the fifth, or the G on string 6, fret 3 (**Example 1b**). Get this in your muscle memory and you'll have the basic boom-chuck strum down. For variety, you can add upward strums on the "ands" of beats 2 and 4. Aim for the top two or three strings on the chords, as notated in **Example 1c**. You don't need to be too exacting here; because you are holding down the C chord with your fretting fingers, whichever strings you strum will sound good. Next, try the same thing but add two more upward strums, on the "ands" of beats 1 and 3 (**Example 1d**). It might take a little time to get fluent with these strums, but keep at it, as they are essential accompaniment patterns for any acoustic guitarist.

2 EXTEND THE PATTERNS

Now try the same moves on an F chord. Don't worry if you can't yet play this shape with your first finger barred across all six strings—you can work around it with the five-note shape shown in **Example 2a** and play the bass notes with the root on string 4 (third-fret F) and fifth on string 5 (third-fret C). I like to keep my fourth finger on the F and third finger on the C throughout, but you can also do it by moving your third finger between those two low notes. In any case, once you get the hang of it, try adding strums on the "ands," as shown in **Examples 2b** and **2c**.

Once you're comfortable playing the boom-chuck pattern on the F, try it on a G chord. The root is now the G on string 6, fret 3, and the fifth is the open D string—see **Examples 3a–c** for a few different strumming variations on this chord. Make sure that you are comfortable playing boom-chuck patterns on C, F, and G chords before moving on.

3 PLAY SOME TUNES

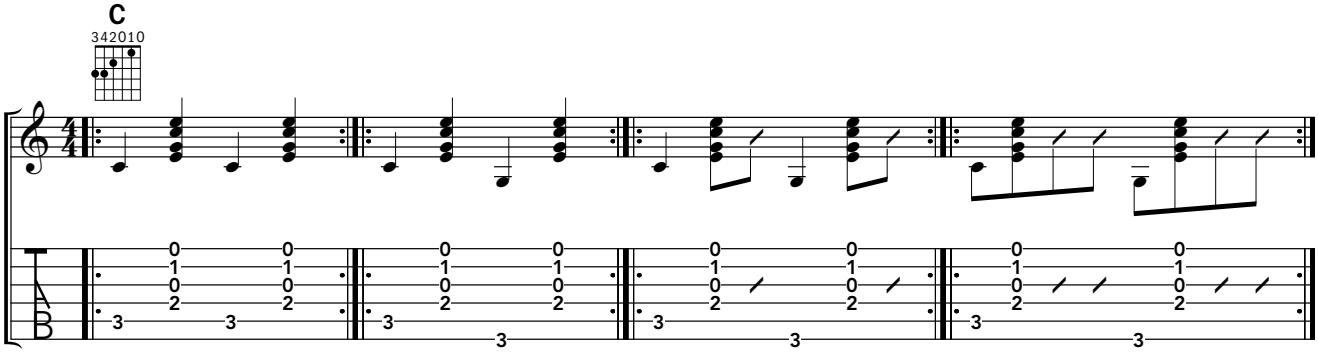
Now let's use the boom-chuck pattern on a portion of a traditional song you learned in a previous lesson, "Waterbound" (**Example 4**). Start with a walkup on the bottom two strings—G, A, B—always a nice way to begin a tune. Notice the quick chord changes in bars 6 and 7—C–F and C–G, respectively. If needed, practice those changes on their own until you can play them smoothly. After you can play the whole excerpt continuously, try adding some of those upstroke strums seen in previous examples .

While all of this lesson's examples have been in 4/4 time up to this point, you can also use the boom-chuck pattern in 3/4, or waltz time. **Example 5** demonstrates how to do so with another traditional song, "In the Pines." The basic idea is to play a bass note on beat 1, followed by strums on 2 and 3, and you can throw in upstroke strums on the "ands" as you like. Another fun thing to do is to add walkups between chords, like in **Example 6**, based on the progression of Ex. 5, where a bass line in bar 2 connects the G and C chords in the surrounding measures.

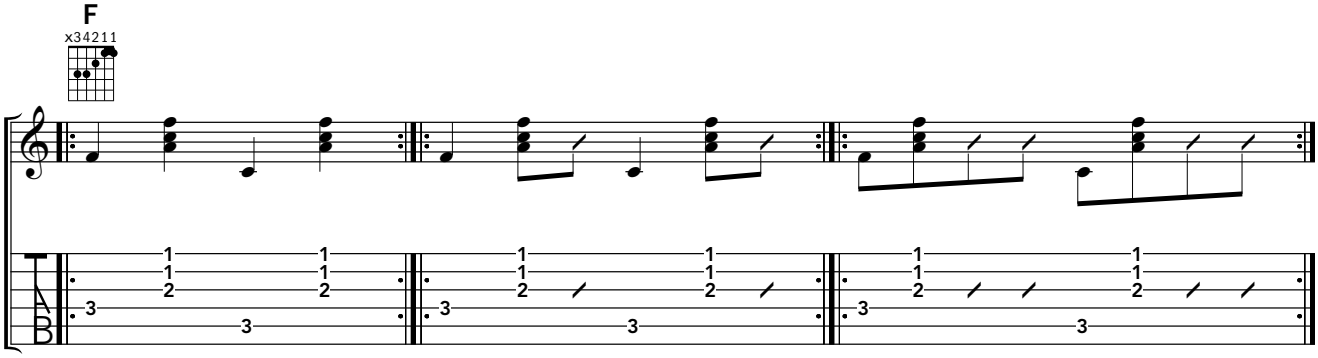
Now that you've taken your strumming to the next level, try using these boom-chuck patterns when playing your favorite songs! AG

Cathy Fink is a Grammy Award–winning multi-instrumentalist based in the Washington, DC, area. She teaches bluegrass and Americana guitar and performs around the world with her partner, Marcy Marxer. cathymarcy.com

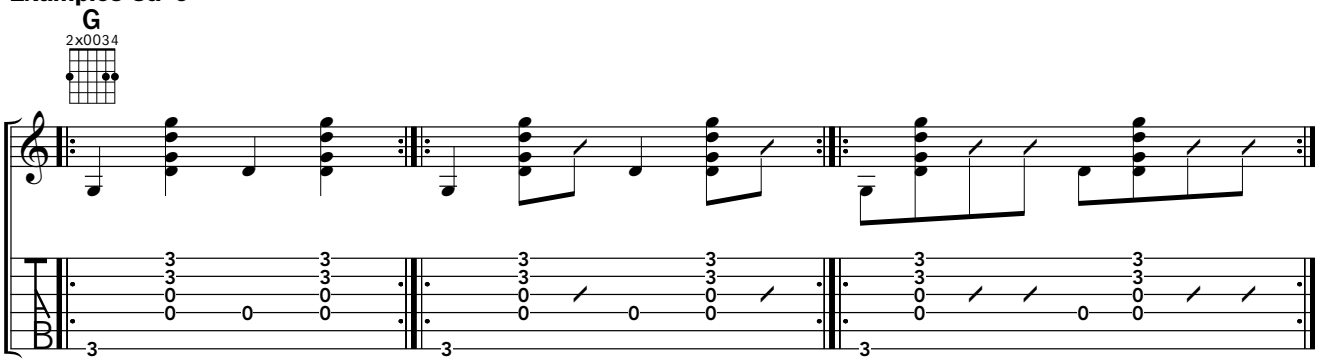
Examples 1a–d



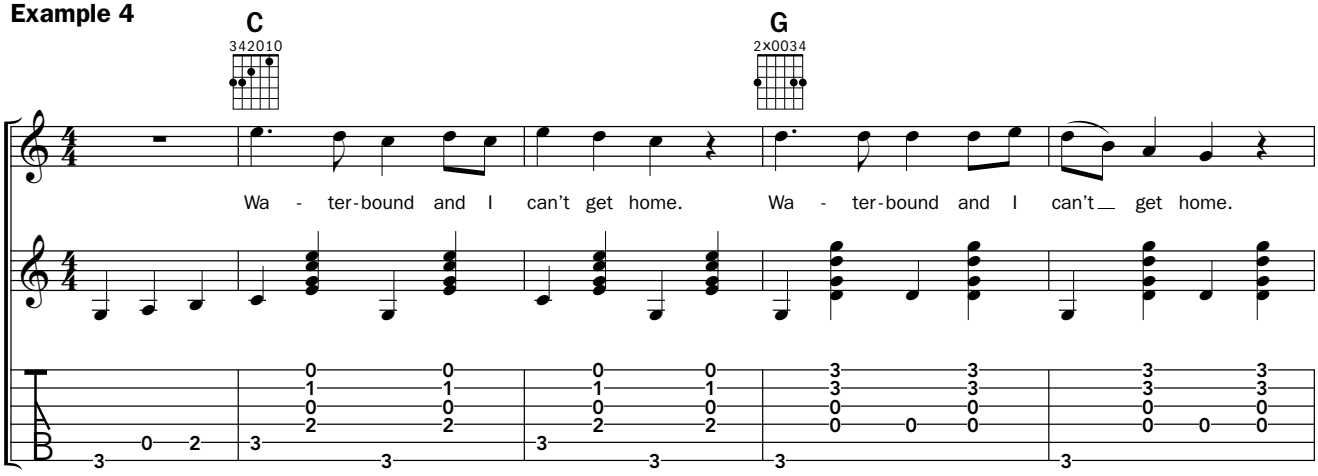
Examples 2a–c

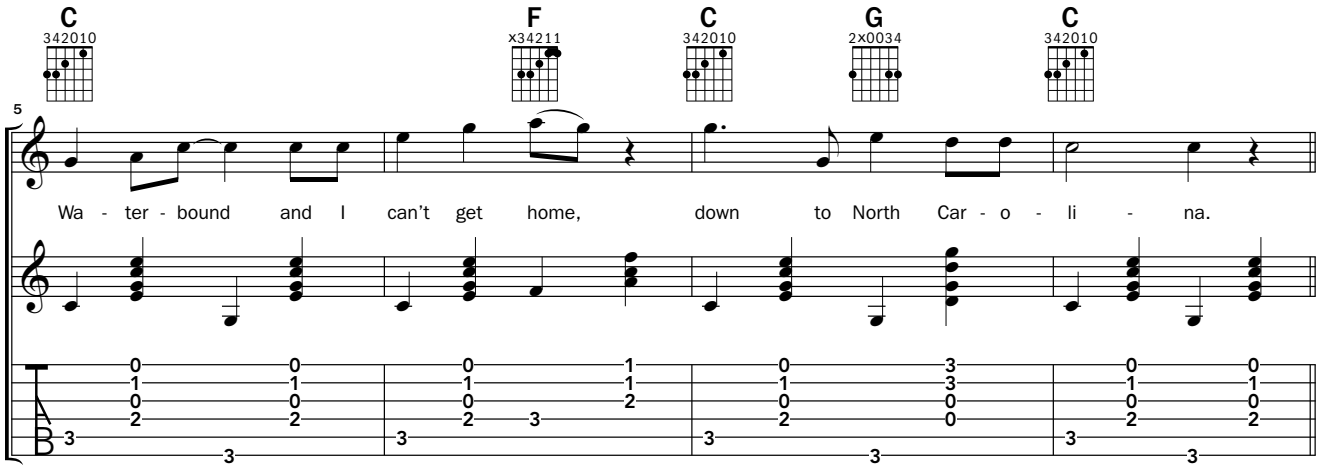


Examples 3a–c

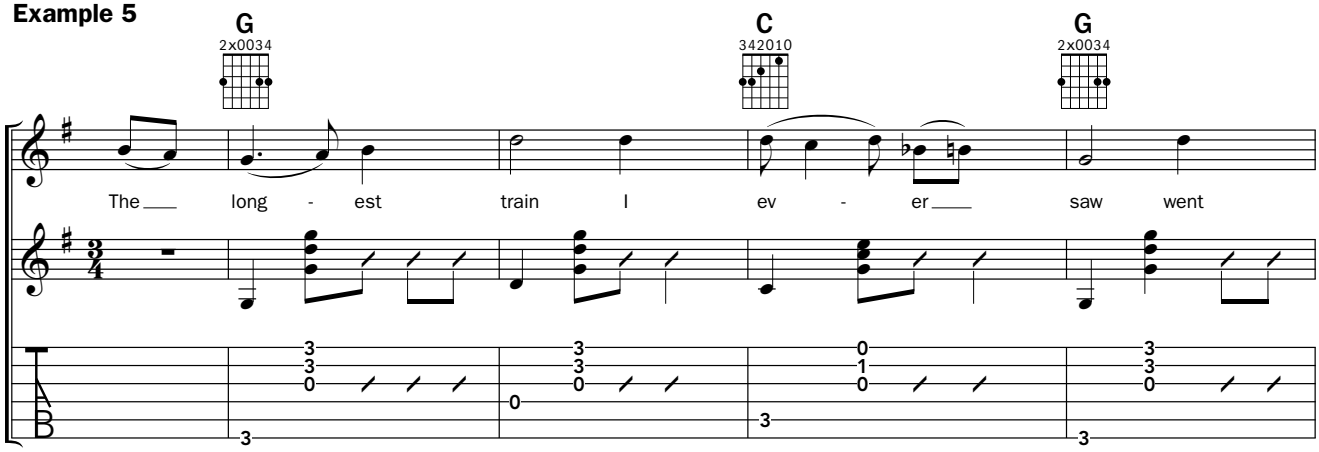


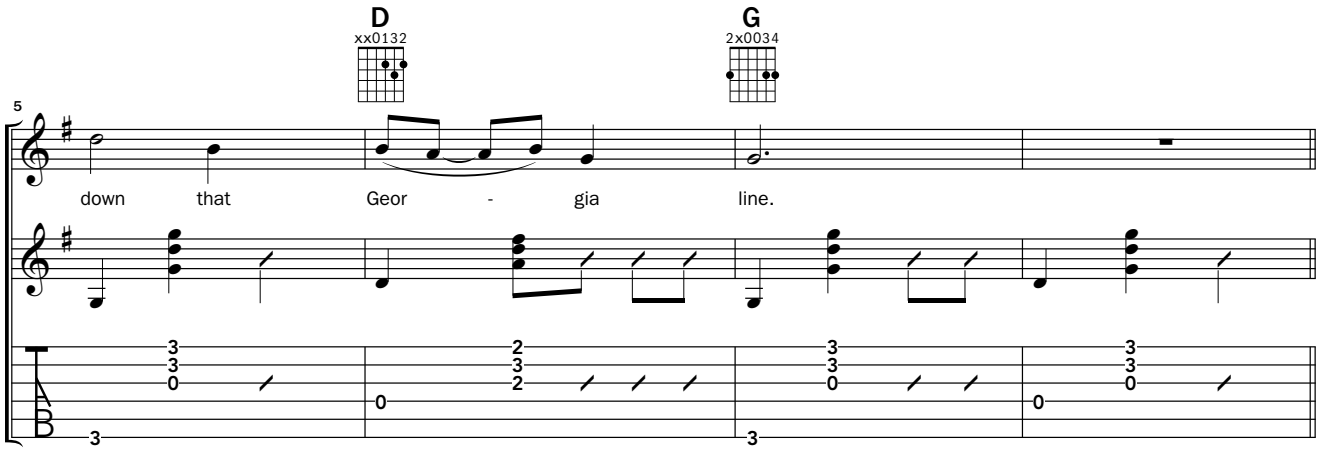
Example 4



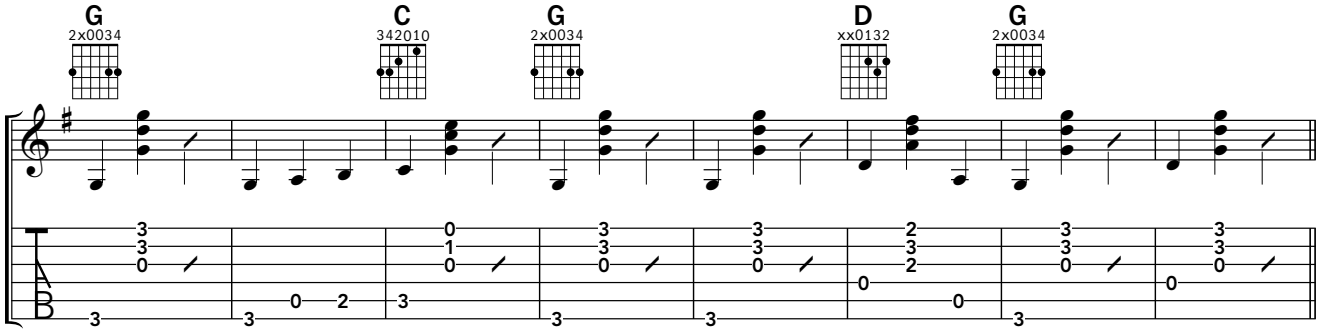


Example 5





Example 6




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W.C. Handy



VAN VECHTEN

Father of the Blues

Arranging W.C. Handy for fingerstyle guitar

BY JON SHAIN

Born William Christopher Handy in Florence, Alabama, in 1873—W.C. Handy was known as the "Father of the Blues," and he must not have minded the nickname—it's the title of his autobiography. Handy's claim to that sobriquet is not in having invented blues music but in bringing it to the masses in some of the earliest published and recorded songs of the genre. Indeed, his "The Memphis Blues" was the first-ever recorded blues song in 1914.

But Handy was no itinerant guitar-slinger in the stereotypically imagined vein. He was a classically trained musician who wrote music, taught in schools, and traveled the South with a large band playing the popular music of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—heavily influenced by classical music, the brass band music made popular by Sousa, and the ragtime of his contemporaries like Scott Joplin. In 1903, while touring with his group in Cleveland, Mississippi, Handy heard a local folk-blues trio play, and witnessing the crowd's reaction, became convinced of the music's inevitable wider commercial appeal. In Handy's own words, "There before the boys lay more money than my nine musicians were being paid for the entire engagement. Then I saw the beauty of primitive music."

So, Handy took the guitar-based blues and began working it into complex arrangements for piano and, later, for full bands, to great success. In my 2017 recording, *Gettin' Handy with the Blues—A Tribute to the Legacy of W.C. Handy*, I set out to bring his music back to its original source and created fingerstyle guitar arrangements of these largely ragtime-influenced songs. In this lesson, we'll look at a few of the key pieces of the puzzle in adapting a ragtime piano piece for fingerstyle guitar. We'll focus on chord fingerings, moving bass ideas, and anticipating the beat in the melody, culminating in a portion of my arrangement of Handy's 1917 song "Beale Street Blues."

SMART FINGERINGS

In creating an arrangement of a Handy tune, it is important to be able to play the vocal melody and some answering phrases along with the chords and interesting moving bass parts associated with the genre. Much of Handy's music was originally scored in flat keys (most likely for brass instruments or piano), so in order to make arrangements for a standard-tuned guitar, I transpose them to one of our most popular keys—C, A, G, E, or D. To make matters stickier, many of Handy's original blues compositions were much more complex than latter-day blues, and often modulated to different keys within a song.

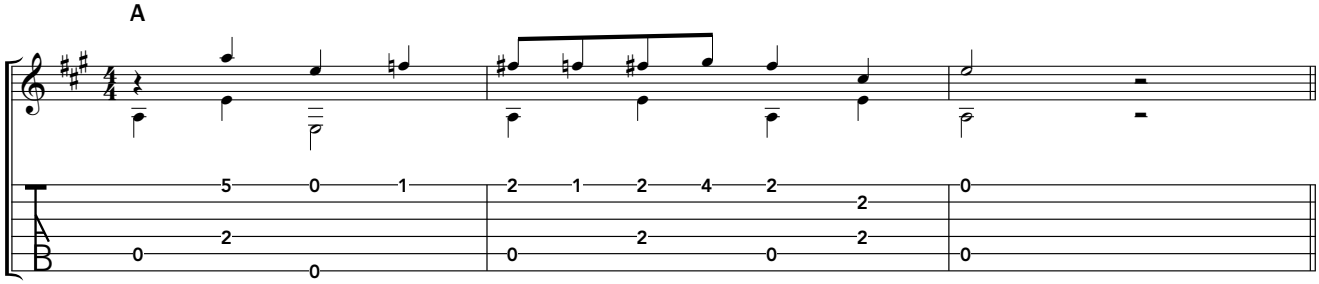
In playing rags and instrumental blues with independently moving melodies and bass lines, it's important to choose your fretting-hand fingerings wisely. Begin **Example 1**, for instance, with a first-finger barre on strings 1–4 at fret 2. Lift the barre to play the open strings on beat 3 of bar 1, before placing the barre at the first fret on beat 4 and then moving it back up to the second fret on the downbeat of measure 2, etc. This figure also shows an interesting note choice—through the major seventh (fourth-fret G♯), Handy brought brighter tones into his blues, perhaps to make them more upbeat for the larger general audience.

In **Example 2**, the same barre technique works nicely for an answering phrase based out of the A major pentatonic scale (A B C♯ E F♯). We again dip down to the first fret for the minor third (C) before finishing in the familiar major pentatonic box. There are arguments to be made for using the thumb only to pick the D string notes of this riff, or for using a thumb-and-index combination for those notes. I would suggest trying both methods and go with what feels and sounds better to you.

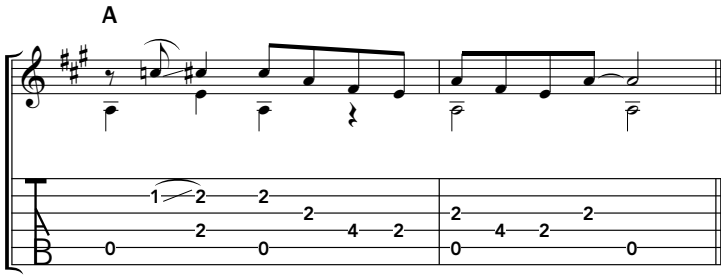
CHROMATIC MOVES AND CHORDAL ANTICIPATION

One really fun feature of ragtime music is the moving bass with lots of leading tones (notes that are a half step away from a chord tone).
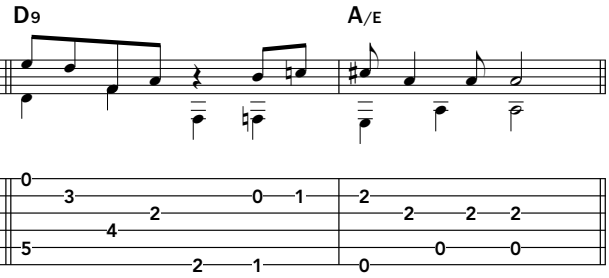
Example 1



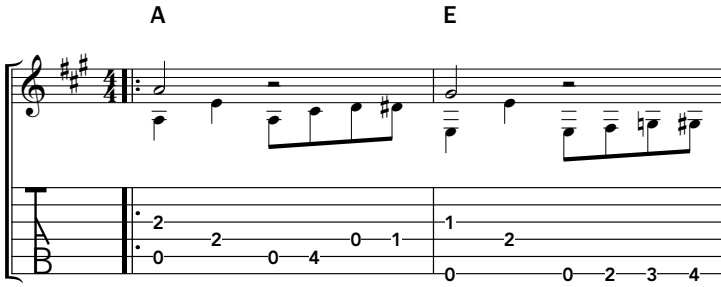
Example 2



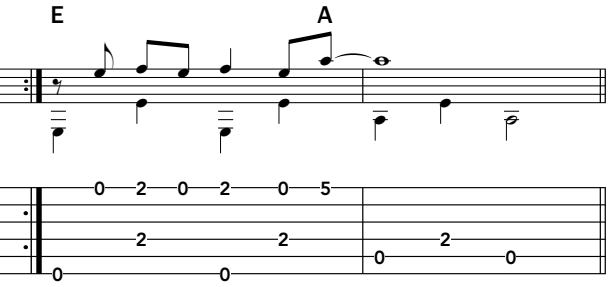
Example 3
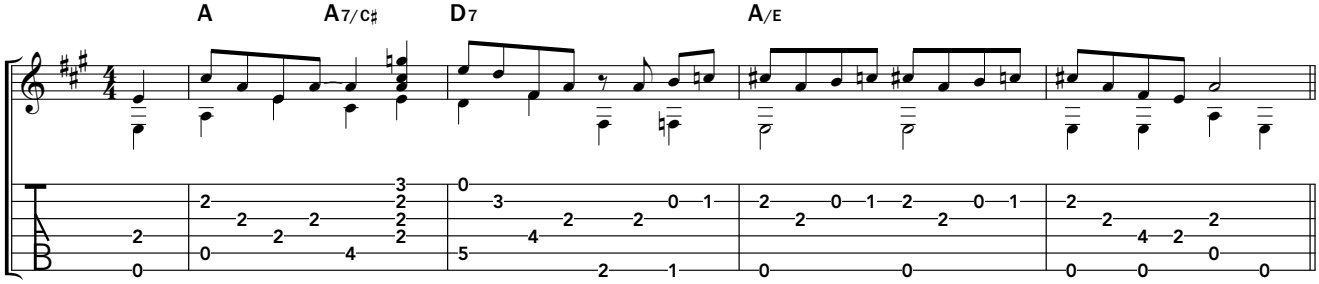


Example 4

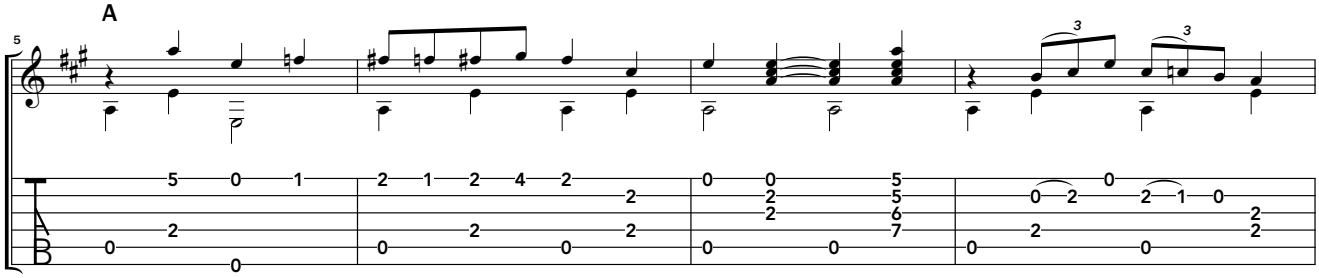


Example 5



Example 6
"Beale Street Blues"





Often we see these bass notes at the end of a measure leading us to the bass note of the next chord. There are bound to be compromises when trying to cover melody, chords, and bass with one guitar and at times we need to let go of a chord to be able to get to the next one in style. We'll look at two different ideas here. Both may feel unfamiliar to the strictly alternating-thumb style folk guitarist, but these techniques can really open up a lot of fun stuff if used as connective tissue in an otherwise alternating-thumb approach.

Example 3 is built on a descending bass line moving down from an open C7-shaped D7 chord to an A chord with an E in the bass. This figure might sound strange at a slow tempo, but it is a common theme in the tuba bass lines of the old-time ragtime bands. In any case, make sure to abandon that seventh-chord shape on the "and" of beat 2.

I've created a little exercise in **Example 4** where the bass becomes a chromatic line in eighth notes, leading towards the following chord. Use your thumb to do all of the work on strings 6–4, again abandoning the chord shape (in this case A) to make it happen.

Another signature sound in early blues and ragtime songs involves the anticipation of a chord change, usually on the offbeat right before a new chord. In such instances, it's important to fret not just the melody but the whole chord shape before the downbeat of the following measure. For instance, in the first measure of **Example 5**, on the "and" of beat 4, move to an open A chord with your fourth finger on the first-string A.

The idea of the short instrumental intro before the repeated verse form was already pretty standard in the popular music of Handy's day, but was rarely used in the folk-blues idiom.

BEALE STREET BLUES
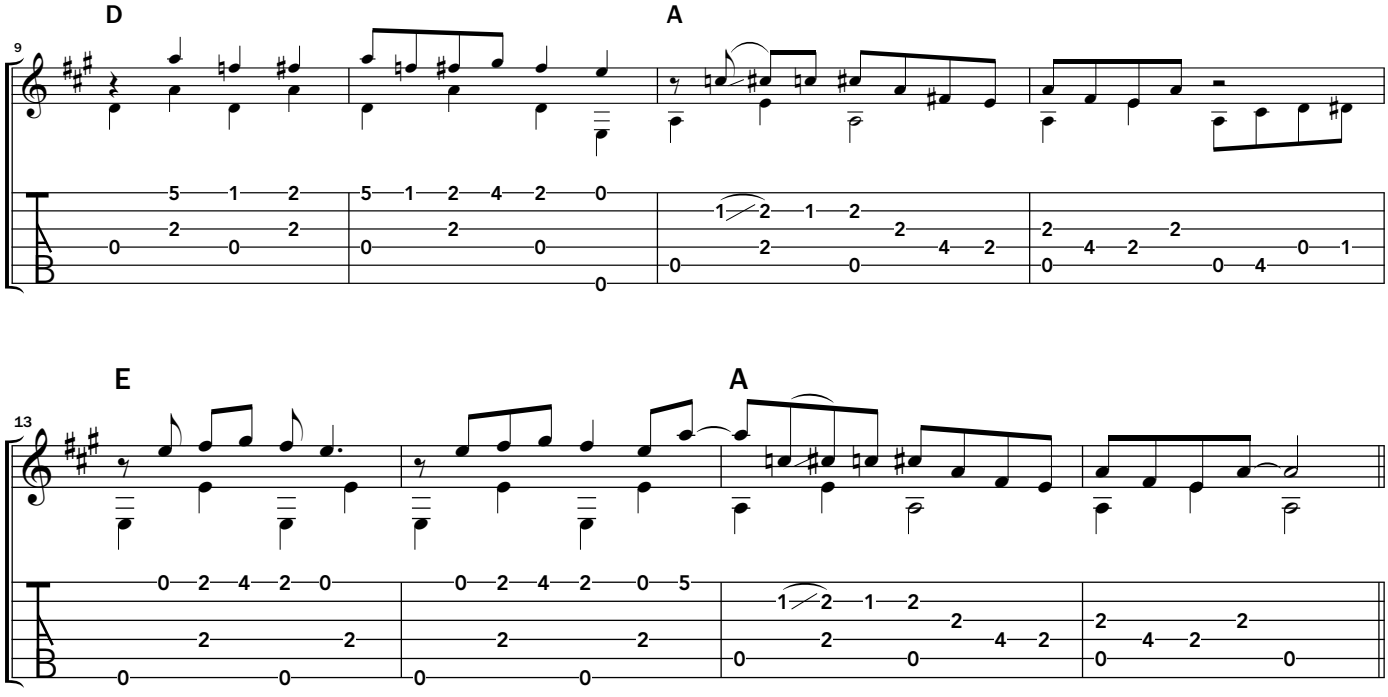
Example 6 depicts the first section of "Beale Street Blues"—a four-bar intro, followed by a 12-bar blues form. The idea of the short instrumental intro before the repeated verse form was already pretty standard in the popular music of Handy's day, but was rarely used in the folk-blues idiom. Later, seminal blues guitar records such as Blind Blake's *Police Dog Blues* (1929) employed the instrumental intros regularly. The bass move of Ex. 3 is seen in the second measure of the intro section here.

I often use different three-note voicings of the same chord while keeping an open string in the bass, like the pair of A voicings in measure 7, allowing me to employ a moving treble with my right-hand fingers while keeping a steady bass note with my thumb. It's much harder to bring the higher chords into play if you use barre shapes. The A, D, and E chords, with their "freebie" open string bass notes, are the fingerstyle player's best friends for improvising up high over steady bass notes.

A note about a couple of the fingerings: Play the D chord in measures 9–10 with a first-finger barre across strings 1–3 at fret 2 and grab both the fifth-fret A and fourth-fret G♯ with your fourth finger. In bars 13–14, form a regular open E shape and use your fourth finger for the first-string notes at frets 2 and 4. You can let go of the E chord very quickly to reach up to that fourth-fret G♯.

I hope that this lesson has given you ideas not just for arranging W.C. Handy tunes but for playing folk-blues and ragtime in general. AG

Jon Shain, the author of Gettin' Handy With the Blues *(Mel Bay), is a guitarist, teacher, and producer based in Durham, North Carolina. jonshain.com*











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Add variety to your playing with slash chords.



JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Connecting Chords

How to strengthen chord progressions and bass lines with slash chords

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Slash chords are an essential tool for adding variety to chord progressions and creating smoother movement from chord to chord. The slash refers literally to the chord symbol, as in G/B—usually spoken as "G slash B" or "G over B"—which simply means that you're playing a note other than the root on the bottom of the chord. This small change to a chord voicing can have a big impact on the sound of a progression, as we'll explore in this lesson.

We'll build a library of slash chord shapes through a series of examples based on the chord progression to "A Whiter Shade of Pale," Procul Harum's iconic song from 1967, with its Bach-inspired organ accompaniment. The song uses slash chords throughout to create powerful descending chord movement and provides a useful platform for developing your slash chord vocabulary.

SLASH CHORD BASICS

The simplest type of slash chord is an inversion—that is, a rearrangement of the notes in the chord.

A C major triad, for instance, has the notes C (root), E (third), and G (fifth); when they are stacked in that order, with C on the bottom, that's just called a C chord (or C major). Putting the fifth on the bottom, so the chord is spelled, say, G–C–E, creates the slash chord C/G. The fifth is a very common alternate bass note in any chord, so an inversion like this makes a subtle change in the harmony.

Another common slash chord voicing puts the third of the chord as the lowest note, as in C/E. Inversions with the third on the bottom sound less resolved than ones stacked on the fifth.

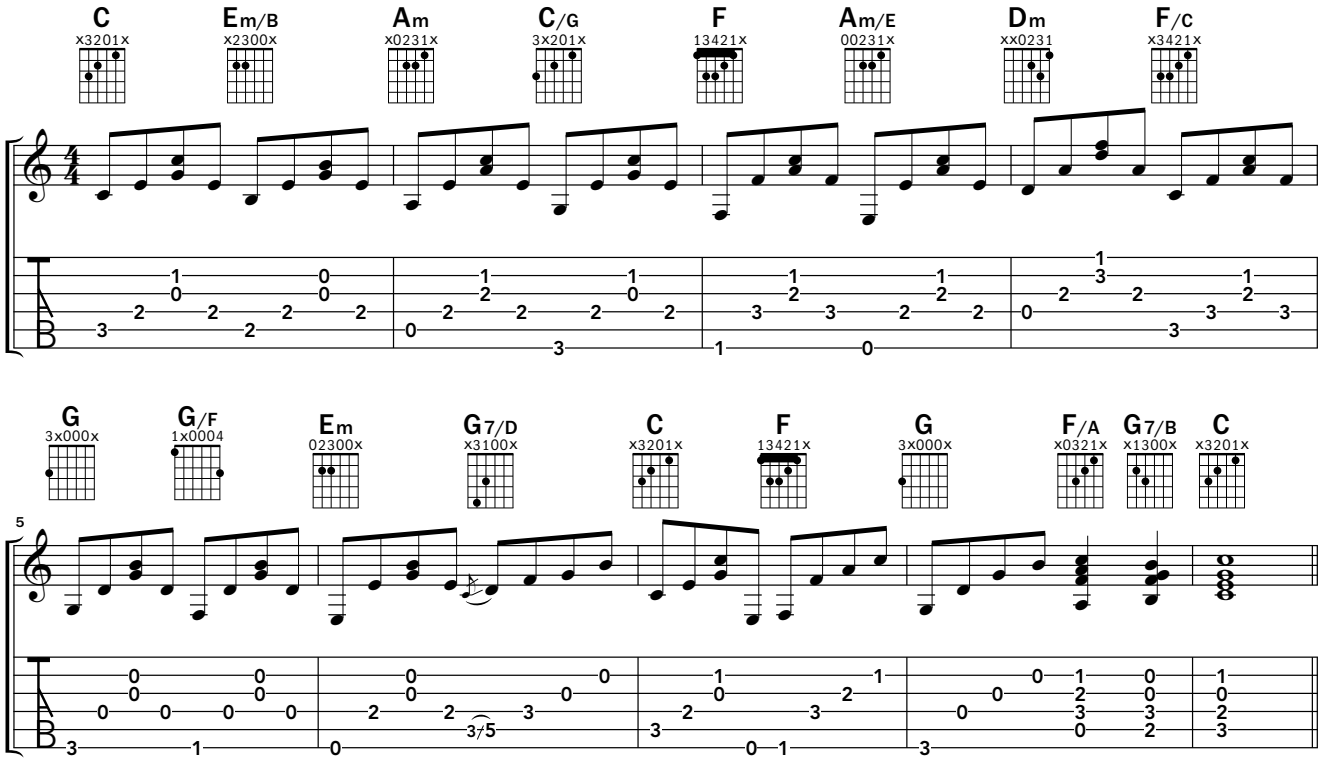
In addition to inversions, you'll encounter slash chords that have a bass note that's *not* in the basic triad, as in C/B or D/C. These sorts of slash chords are often transitional, creating bass movement leading to another chord; you might, for instance, play C to C/B to Am, with the bass descending in steps from C to B to A. You'll see that kind of movement throughout the examples below.

WEEK ONE

Now let's jump in and try some slash chords in

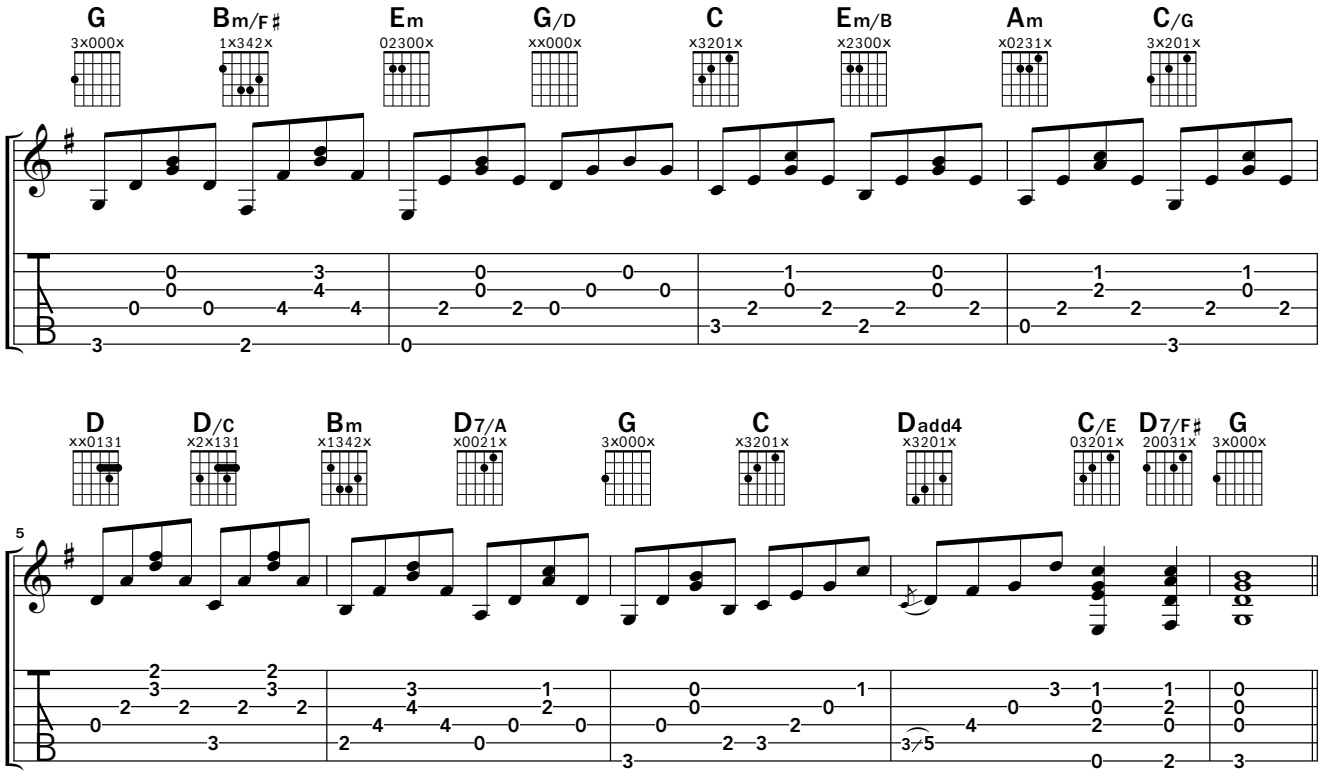
WEEK 1

Example 1



WEEK 2

Example 2



Beginners' Tip #1

As you play through these shapes, identify which note is on the bottom—a chord tone like the third or fifth, or another note—so you can learn to recognize the harmonic relationships.

an example based on the intro/interlude progression in "A Whiter Shade of Pale." The essence of the song is that chords change every two beats (or sometimes more often), and the bass line descends in steps almost nonstop; when the bass gets to the lower end of the register, it jumps up an octave and starts descending again. My fingerstyle guitar adaptation uses the same type of descending movement, and what makes that possible is—you guessed it—lots of slash chords.

First play the progression in C, the song's original key. In **Example 1**, you'll find a number of slash chord shapes with the fifth in the bass: Em/B, C/G, Am/E, F/C, and G7/D. The F/A and G7/B in measure 8 have the third in the bass. On the G/F in measure 5, the F—a note that's not in a G triad—moves the bass line toward the Em that follows.

Start the example on a C and immediately descend in the bass: to Em/B, Am, C/G, F, and Am/E. At that point, you've hit your lowest bass note in standard tuning, so jump up to the fourth string for Dm, and descend again from there: the bass notes go to C, G, F, and E, before looping back up to D on the G7/D.

Note that the chord sequence in measures 1–6 accounts for the bulk of "A Whiter Shade of Pale." In the verse (not shown), you play this six-bar sequence twice, and then once again to kick off the chorus.

WEEK TWO

Once you've got this chord sequence under your fingers in the key of C, try it out in a few more keys. Through the following examples, the picking pattern is very similar to the one used in C, but these other keys employ some different slash chord shapes.

In **Example 2**, play the progression in the key of G, again using slash chords with the fifth in the bass (Bm/F♯, Em/B, C/G, D7/A), with the third in the bass (C/E, D7/F♯), and with a note outside the chord in the bass (D/C).

For the Bm/F♯ in measure 1, the shape could include a fifth-string B, but I've opted to leave it out so there's more separation between the notes on the sixth and fourth strings. The same is true for the C/G in measure 4, with the fifth string muted. In some musical contexts, you may want to mute or skip strings like this in a slash chord to put more emphasis on your alternate bass note.

In other chord shapes in this lesson, too, I've left out strings that could be included. The D7/F♯ in measure 8, for instance, could have an additional F♯ note on the first string. I'm reducing this chord because I prefer its tighter sound—plus this fingering is a bit easier to play.

In measure 5, hold the D chord shape with an index finger barre and your ring finger so that you can easily add the middle finger on the fourth string for the D/C. In measure 8, slide the C shape up two frets for the Dadd4, and then play a C/E to D7/F♯ to G for a sweet, hymn-like closing cadence. The slash chord C/E, with the open sixth string, is surprisingly uncommon considering how easy it is to play, and it makes a nice transition to an F or, as in this example, a D/F♯.

The fifth is a very common alternate bass note in any chord, so an inversion like this makes a subtle change in the harmony.

In **Example 3,** play in the key of D. Start with a closed-position D at the second fret and descend in the bass to the open fourth string, then continue down to the sixth string E. For the A in measure 5, use a first-finger barre to set yourself up for the following A/G.

WEEK THREE

This week, play the same progression in two other keys to work through additional slash chord shapes and moves.

Playing this progression in the key of A, in **Example 4,** offers some nice options for extending the chord voicings with open strings.

Beginners' Tip #2

For the main arpeggio pattern in these examples, pick the bass note with your thumb, followed by: index, middle/ring together, and index again.

Play the A in fifth position in measure 1 for a smooth shift to the C♯m/G♯, and continue the descent to the A/E. In measure 6, leave the top two strings open for a lush C♯m7 and then an E7/B up at the sixth and seventh frets.

The key of E also presents opportunities to use more open strings. In **Example 5,** through the first four chords (E, G♯m/D♯, C♯m7, E5/B), let the open second string ring while the other voices descend.

In measure 5, hold the fourth-fret barre with your ring finger through the B, B/A, and G♯m7. The B7/F♯ that follows is a handy all-around slash chord shape that is a staple of swing rhythm—and it's movable if you leave out the open second string.

WEEK FOUR

For the last week of this workout, check out every guitarist's favorite key, F, in **Example 6**. You may be surprised by how nicely this progression falls in F, with a lot of open-position slash chords (Am/E, Dm/A, C7/G, and more).

Start with an F shape on the top four strings and descend an octave through the first four measures, down to an F on the sixth string. In measure 4, keep your fourth finger planted on string 2, fret 3, while you change from Dm/A to Gm to B♭/F.

In measures 5 and 6, play the third string open through the C to C/B♭ to Am7, creating a common tone as you move from chord to chord.

Now that you've worked with the progression from "A Whiter Shade of Pale" in six keys, you've covered quite a few shapes and combinations of slash chords. As you arrange other songs, try substituting slash chords in order to create a more connected sound in the progression, and to develop bass lines that move in smaller steps rather than jumping around. These subtleties in how you voice the chords will make your whole guitar part more mellifluous and satisfying. AG

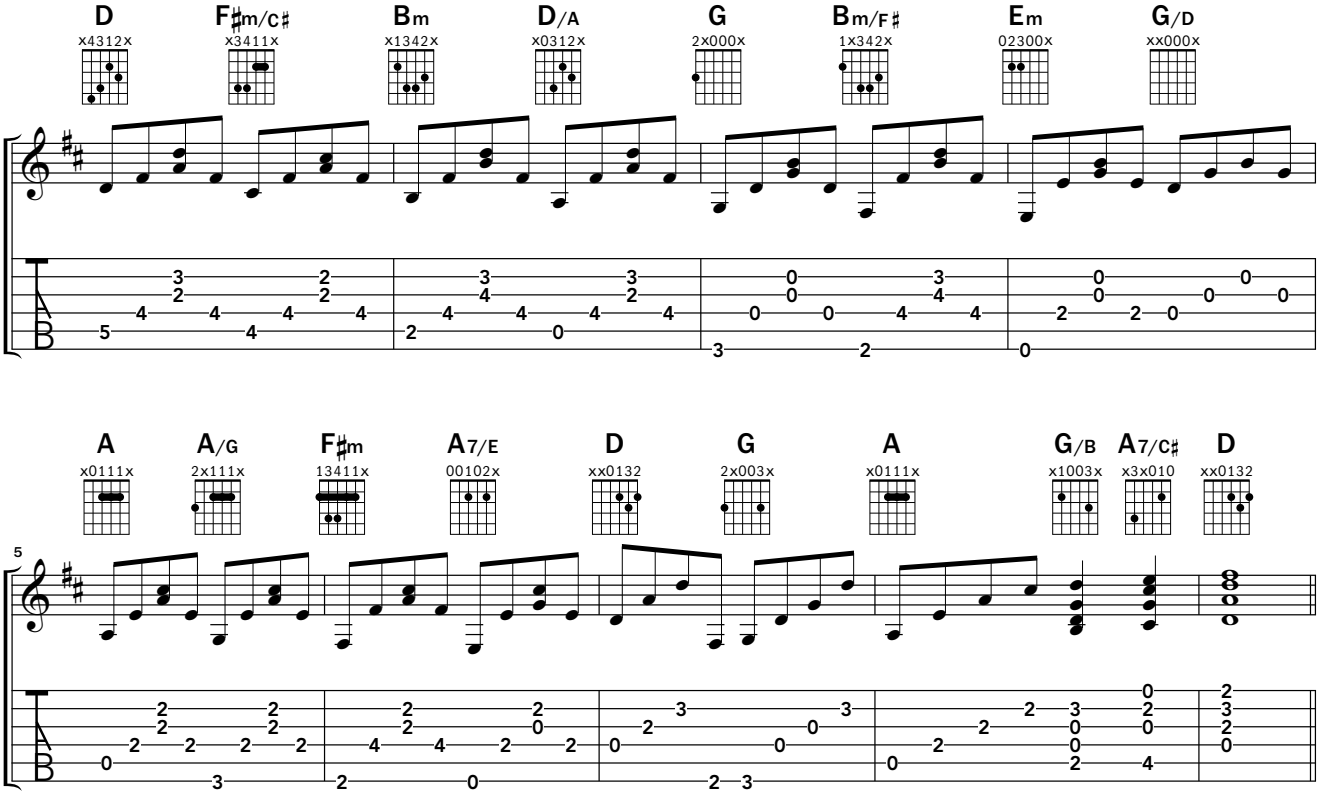
Beginners' Tip #3

Remember that shapes with no open strings are movable; that is, you can play them anywhere on the neck to sound different chords.

Beginners' Tip #4

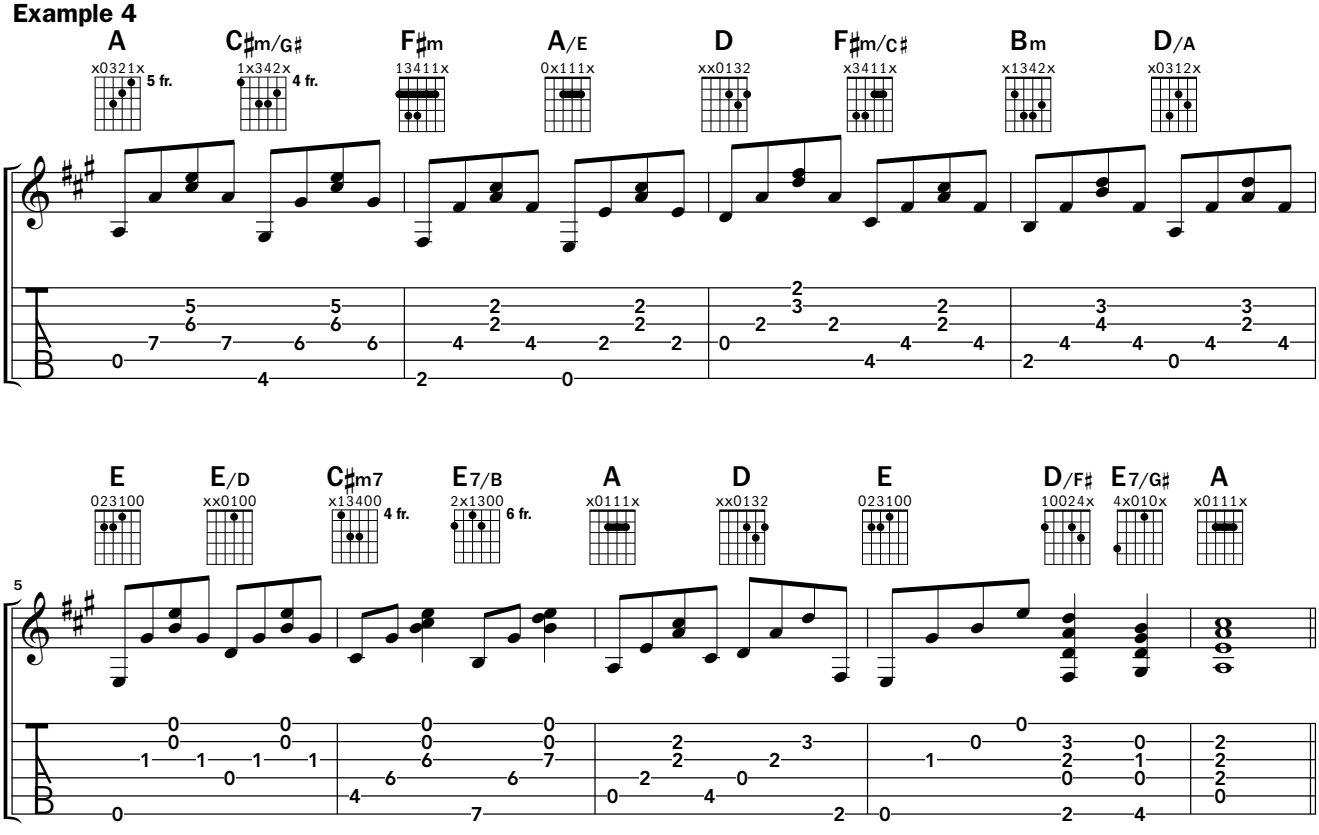
With these chord shapes, only fret the strings you are using—you don't have to hold down the full shape.

Example 3

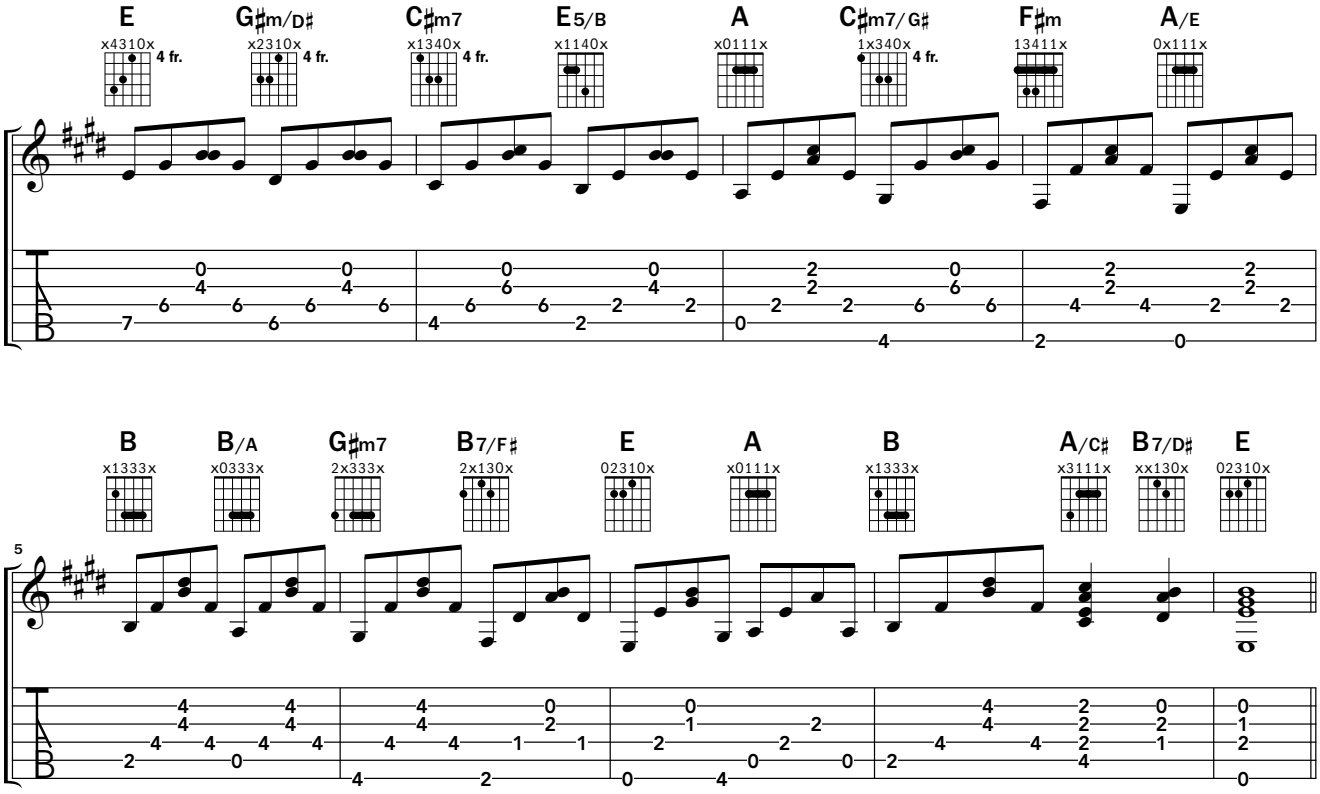


WEEK 3

Example 4

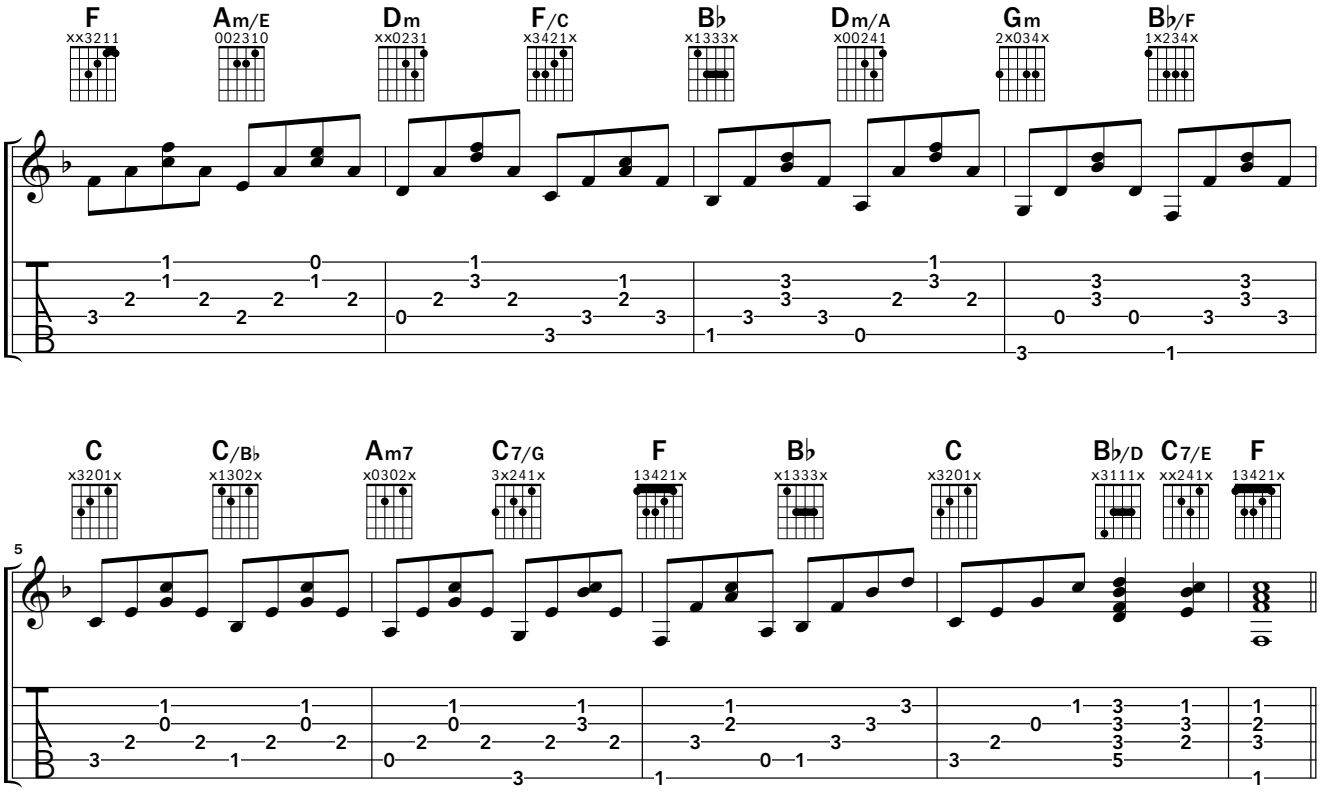


Example 5



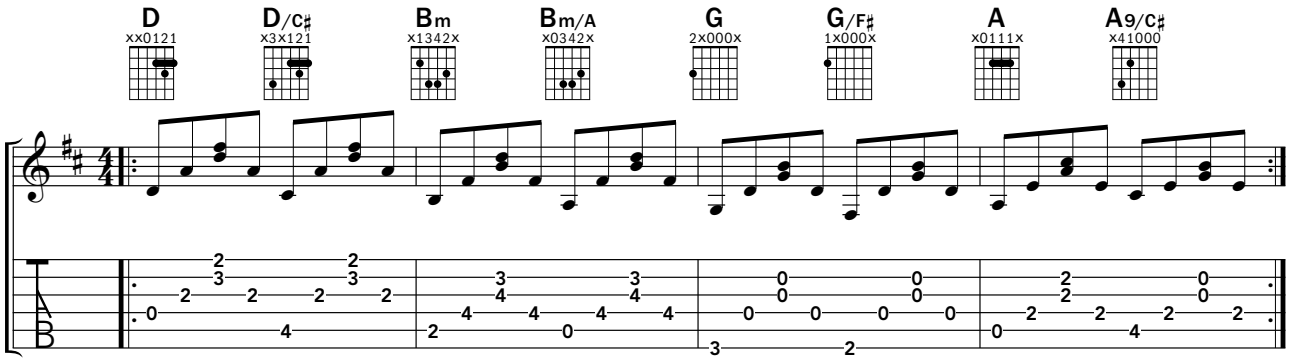
WEEK 4

Example 6



TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Another good use of slash chords is to introduce additional movement into a progression. In this example, the basic harmony is D, Bm, G, A–one measure each, a classic I–vi–IV–V. I've split each measure in half to add a slash chord on beat 3 that moves the bass toward the next chord. The D/C♯ makes a nice transition to the Bm, for instance. Look for places like this where you can use slash chords to set up chord changes.





READERS' PICK

California Dreamin'

Learn a 1960s pop classic by the Mamas and the Papas

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



DUNHILL RECORDS

In their short time recording and performing together, from 1965 to 1968, the folk-pop group the Mamas and the Papas enjoyed a string of hits—"California Dreamin'," "Monday, Monday," and others—that captured the ethos of the early hippie era. The first single, "California Dreamin'," showcased the quartet of lovers and friends with their trademark vocal harmonies, tasteful guitar work, and a bluesy flute solo by jazz musician Bud Shank.

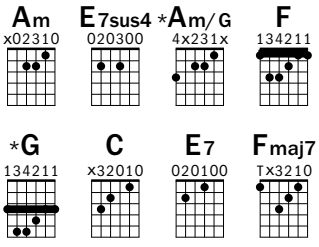
The song is played in the key of A minor, with a capo at the fourth fret causing the music to sound in C♯ minor. It begins with four bars of melancholy guitar, six- and 12-strings playing intertwining lines. You can play the separate parts on one guitar, as shown in the notation here, though it requires a bit of toggling between the first and third positions, and it can be tricky to play the two-against-three rhythm in bar 2, on beats 3 and 4. If you'd like, just repeat the first measure two and a half times, followed by the last half of bar 3 and then bar 4—or eliminate the intro altogether.

Notated below the intro, the strumming pattern here gives a suggestion for what to play in the first four measures of the verse; the same rhythmic approach will work throughout the song. Just keep a steady down-up eighth-note motion in your strumming hand, sometimes skipping the "and" of the beat.

The 16-bar flute solo provides a good opportunity for improvising on the guitar. If you're new to soloing, start with simple phrases, sticking mainly to notes from the A natural minor scale (A B C D E F G), but using the note G♯ whenever there is an E7 chord. And remember that a good rule of thumb is to always keep the melody in your mind's ear when improvising. AG

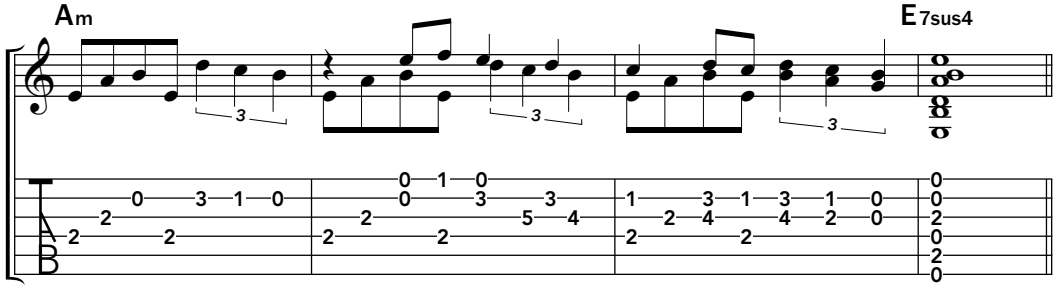
CALIFORNIA DREAMIN' — WORDS AND MUSIC BY JOHN PHILLIPS AND MICHELLE PHILLIPS

Chords, Capo IV

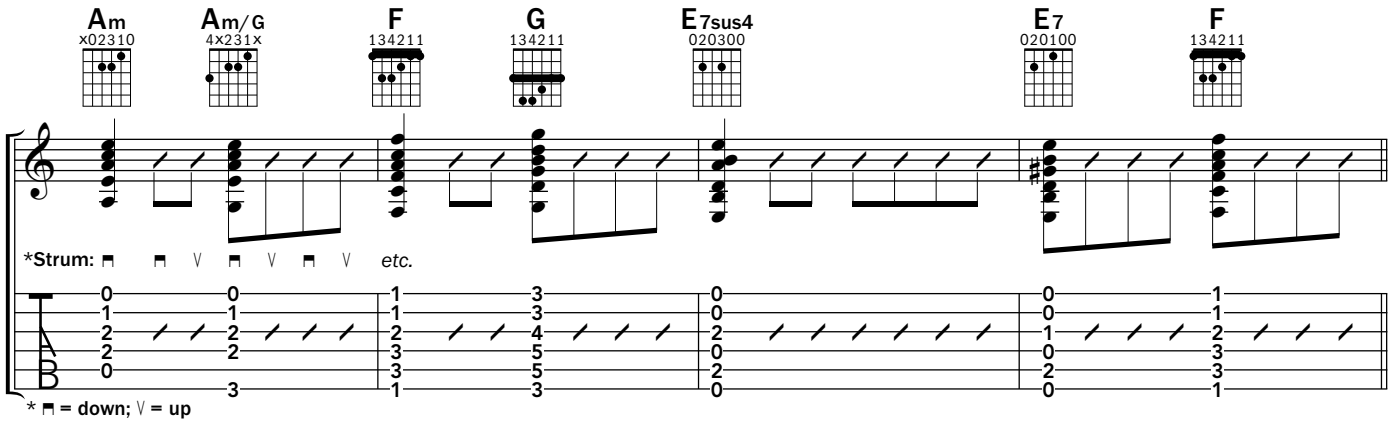


*Option: Substitute open G chord.

Intro



Strumming Pattern



* ⊓ = down; ∨ = up

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Intro

Am E7sus4

Chorus

Am Am/G F
All the leaves are brown
(All the leaves are brown)

G E7sus4 E7 F
And the sky is gray
(And the sky is gray)

C E7 Am
I've been for a walk
(I've been for a walk)

F E7sus4 E7
On a winter's day
(On a winter's day)

Am Am/G F
I'd be safe and warm
(I'd be safe and warm)

G E7sus4 E7
If I was in L.A.
(If I was in L.A.)

Am Am/G F
California dreamin'
(California dreamin')

G E7sus4
On such a winter's day

Am Am/G
1. Stopped in to a church

F G E7sus4 E7
I passed along the way

F C E7 Am
Well, I got down on my knees
(Got down on my knees)

F E7sus4 E7
And I pretend to pray
(I pretend to pray)

Am Am/G F
You know the preacher liked the cold
(Preacher liked the cold)

G E7sus4 E7
He knows I'm gonna stay
(Knows I'm gonna stay)

Am Am/G F G E7sus4
California dreamin' on such a winter's day
(California dreamin')

Flute Solo

Am | 𝄎 | 𝄎 | Am F |

C E7 | Am F | E7sus4 | E7 |

Am Am/G | F G | E7sus4 | E7 |

Am Am/G | F G | E7sus4 | 𝄎 ||

Outro-Chorus

Am Am/G F
All the leaves are brown
(All the leaves are brown)

G E7sus4 E7 F
And the sky is gray
(And the sky is gray)

C E7 Am
I've been for a walk
(I've been for a walk)

F E7sus4 E7
On a winter's day
(On a winter's day)

Am Am/G F
If I didn't tell her
(If I didn't tell her)

G E7sus4 E7
I could leave today
(I could leave today)

Am Am/G F
California dreamin'
(California dreamin')

G Am Am/G F
On such a winter's day
(California dreamin')

G Am Am/G F
On such a winter's day
(California dreamin')

G Fmaj7 Am
On such a winter's day



Fortune Turns the Wheel

A Scottish folk song played with spare but propulsive accompaniment

BY DANNY CARNAHAN

I first heard this sung by Robin Williamson of the Incredible String Band—long past midnight and long past sobriety—in a Calgary hotel room while we were up there for the 1980 Calgary Folk Festival. "Fortune Turns the Wheel" has since become one of my all-time favorite songs and one I find myself singing at memorial parties for fallen friends with sadly increasing frequency. It is simple, and the sung melody needs little in the way of instrumental propulsion, so the guitar setting is spare. Take your time with the rhythm and let it breathe.

When fingering the As on the G string in bars 3 and 4, you may need to work to keep the note ringing clearly as you shift the rest of your hand from the fourth-finger-stretch G chord to the A. I have to remember to use my fourth finger on the fifth fret and not my third finger, as I more often do. **AG**

This arrangement is excerpted from Danny Carnahan's Scottish Songs for Guitar, *available at store.acousticguitar.com.*
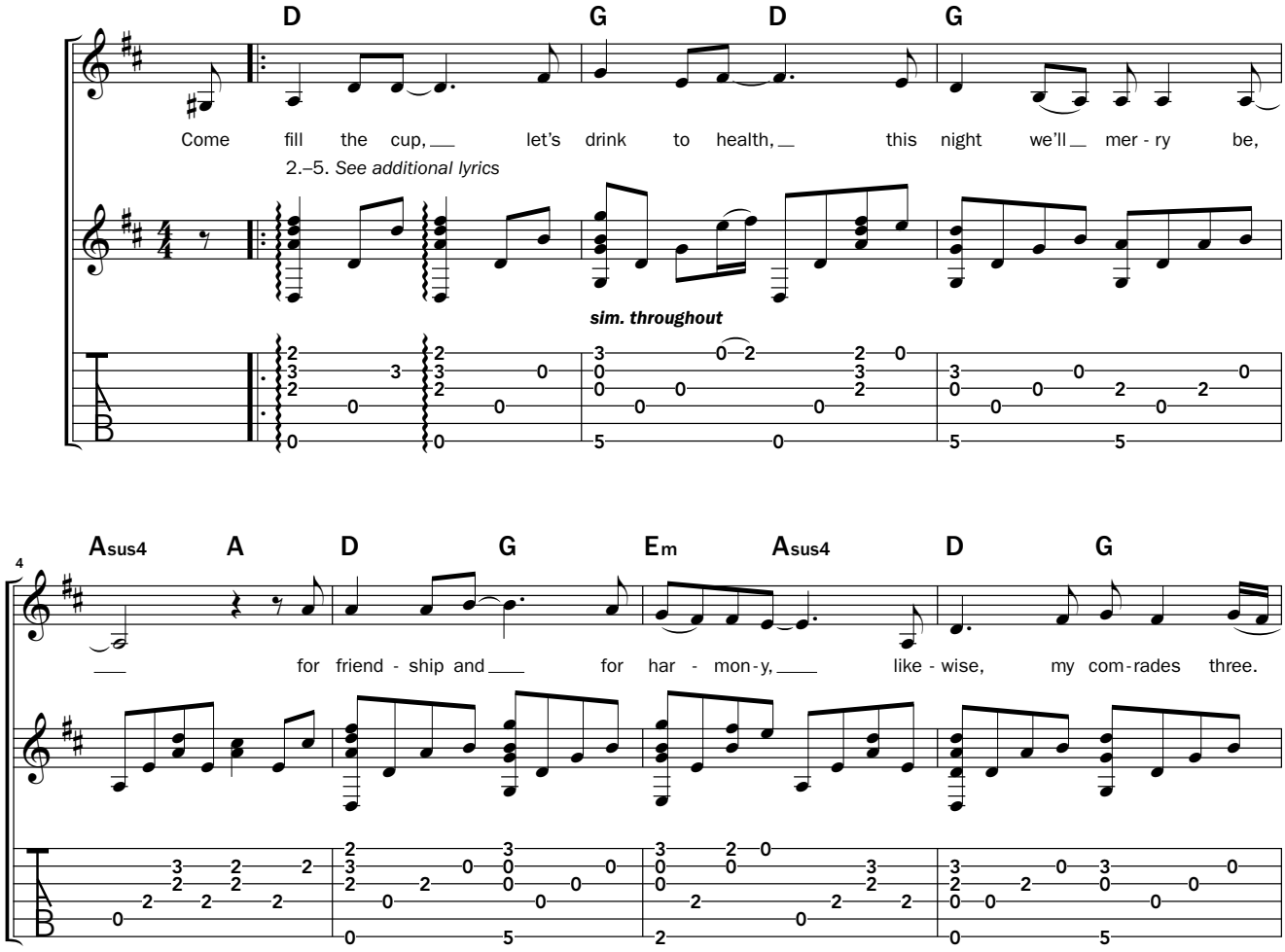
FORTUNE TURNS THE WHEEL

TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY DANNY CARNAHAN
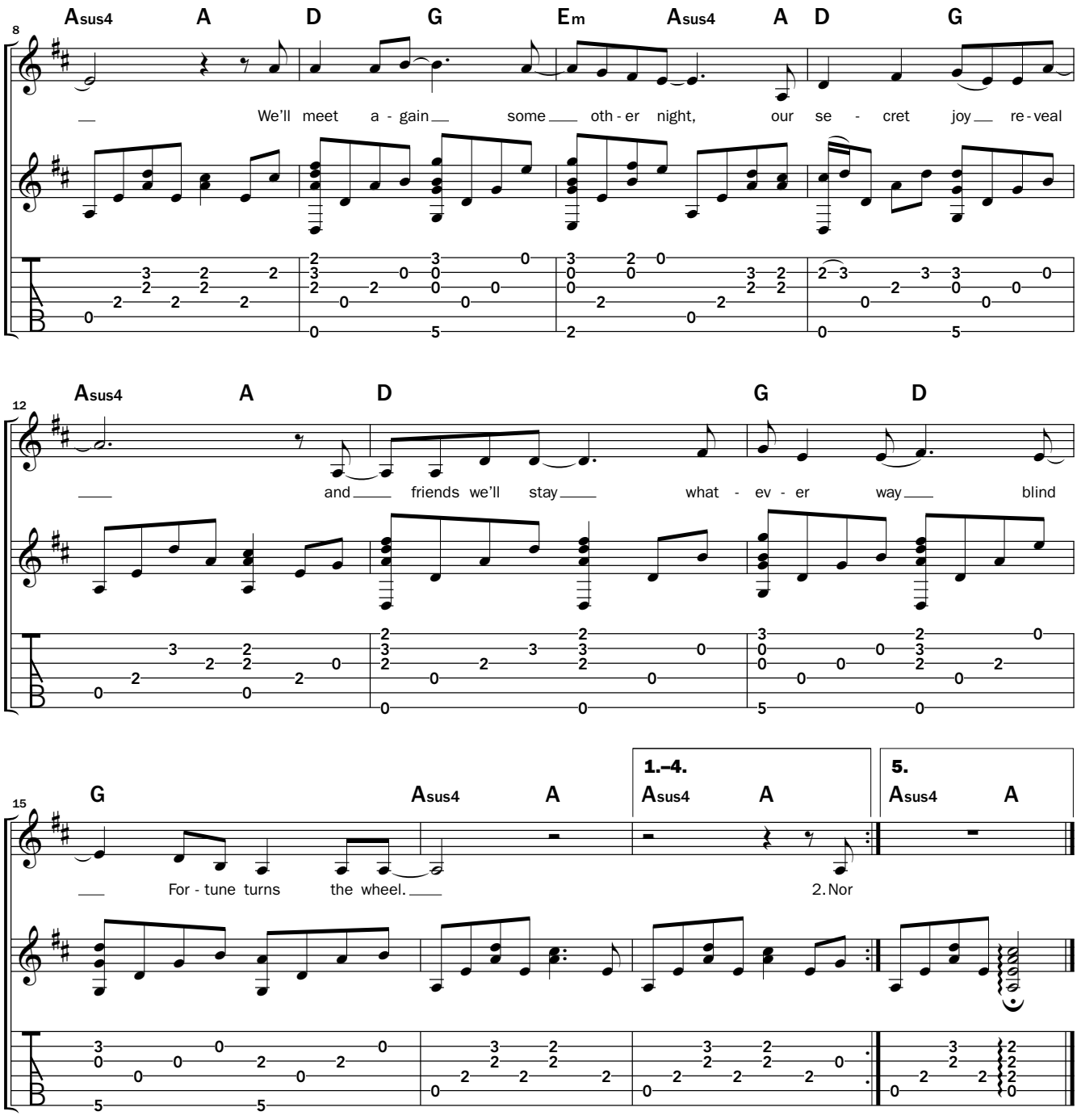
Tuning: D A D G B E

Verse

Slow and Thoughtful



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2. Nor doubt nor rank nor dress I'll take
My estimate of man
But when I meet a friend in need
To him I'll stretch a hand
For him I'll fight, with him I'll drink
To him my mind reveal
And friends we'll stay whatever way blind Fortune turns the wheel

3. But some of my pretended friends
If friends you might them call
For base they turned their backs on me
When mine was at the wall
Yet in a glass I'll drink their health
You know I wish them well
And friends we'll stay whatever way blind Fortune turns the wheel

4. And it's of a lovely lassie, aye
And it's her I justly blame
When black misfortune frowned on me
She denied she knew my name
But friendship, aye, remorse is past
To her I'll never kneel
All sweethearts find faith's true unkind when Fortune turns the wheel

5. So a health to all, sweet Caledone
Likewise sweet Coghat Dale
Where friendship binds the firmest ties
Love tells the sweetest tale
We'll meet again some other night
Our secret joy reveal
And friends we'll stay whatever way blind Fortune turns the wheel

Life According to Raechel

Play Madison Cunningham's moving ode to her grandmother, in C standard tuning

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Revealer



VERVE FORECAST

Right in the middle of Madison Cunningham's new album, *Revealer,* in striking contrast to the percolating beats and layers of instruments on most of the tracks, comes "Life According to Raechel"—a hushed, sparse, gorgeously melodic song that she wrote in honor of her grandmother, who passed away in the early stages of the pandemic.

The track centers on Cunningham's soft fingerstyle guitar, with a string quartet and almost imperceptible bass and percussion. "I wanted it to feel like the eye of the storm," she says. "Everything else has these more complex arrangements, and that song just needed to be a straight arrow."

"Life According to Raechel" showcases the haunting sound of Cunningham's Silvertone guitar with its rubber bridge, in standard tuning lowered to C (see Guitar Talk on page 14). You can play her part with a regular guitar and even in E-to-E standard tuning—though I highly recommend trying C standard, which gives any guitar a very different identity.

The song uses chord shapes in G major, which sound in the key of E♭. For much of the verse, play the hypnotic Gadd4 pattern shown in the example, in which the third- and second-string pitches rub against each other a half step apart. On beats 2 and 4, tap on the soundboard with your pinky—that serves as the song's pulse. "It's funny to play the song without that little tap," she says. "The magic goes away. For whatever reason, it's foundational."

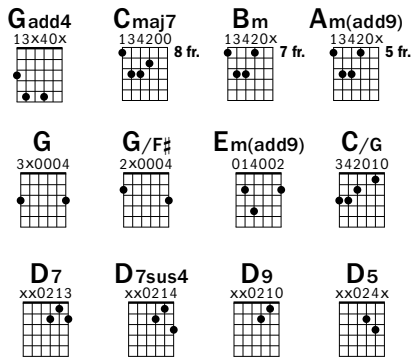
Continue a similar picking pattern through much of the verse, before going to a light fingerstyle bass/strum on the chorus, a classic I–vi–IV–V progression. On the last line of the chorus, play a series of D voicings that double the vocal melody on top.

Some of the chord shapes shown, like the Em9, reflect the way Cunningham played this song solo in a recent *Tiny Desk Concert* for NPR. That performance is well worth watching for a closeup look at her sophisticated style on both acoustic and electric guitars. AG

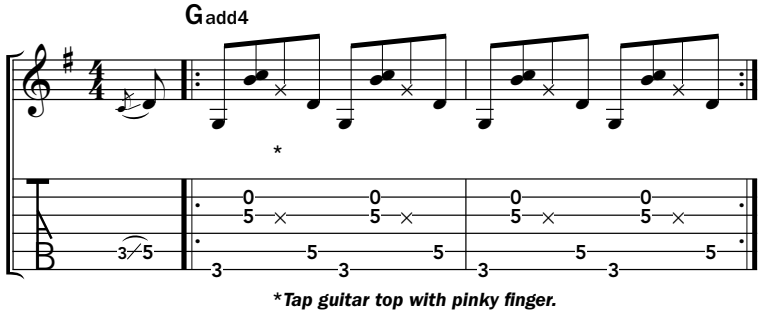


Tuning: C F B♭ E♭ G C

Chords



Verse Pattern



**Tap guitar top with pinky finger.*

Gadd4

1. Once your girl
I'm always your girl
When I'm here or when I'm there
Or on a plane headed somewhere
You were staring down the cars
Hoping it would be one of ours
Cmaj7
Children and grandchildren writing you cards
Bm **Am(add9)**
But how long were you waiting for me
D7 **Gadd4**
To make a left down your street?

Chorus 1

G **G/F♯**
It's not if, darling, it's when
Em(add9)
Was there something left unsaid?
C/G
Were your eyes green, were they blue?
D7 **C/G**
What was it that I forgot to ask you?
G **G/F♯**
Busy hands, I'll set 'em down
Em(add9)
To say I love you right out loud
C/G
I'll bet you're making heaven laugh
D7sus4 **D7** **D9** **D5** **C/G** **Gadd4**
But it feels like tears and memories are all we have

Gadd4

2. Once I knew it
I was always a know it all
Too busy, too stressed out
To take your call
Thought I would always find you there
Sitting in your TV chair
Cmaj7
While time is in a bar having a laugh somewhere
Bm **Am(add9)**
The nurse said you were waiting for me
D7 **Gadd4**
To let go, to let it be

Chorus 2

G **G/F♯**
It's not if, darling, it's when
Em(add9)
There's always something left unsaid
C/G
Were your eyes green, were they blue?
D7 **C/G**
What was it that I forgot to ask you?
G **G/F♯**
Busy hands, I'll set 'em down
Em(add9)
To say I love you here and now
C/G
Did God need a new lead in his band?
D7sus4 **D7** **D9** **D5** **C/G** **Gadd4**
When this world and its people are all we have

Once your girl
I'm always your girl

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Cumberland Gap

How to play Courtney Hartman’s understated arrangement of the traditional favorite

BY ALAN BARNOSKY

Courtney Hartman



KYLE LEHMAN

Flatpicking is typically considered flashy and impressive, but the technique comes across as expressive and understated on Courtney Hartman’s rendition of the old-time fiddle tune “Cumberland Gap,” from her 2016 EP *Nothing We Say*. The guitarist’s recording shows how expert picking, clever open-string harmonies, and a lovely melody can transform basic open-chord shapes into an intricate and stunning solo guitar arrangement.

Hartman is one of the great acoustic guitarists of our time, a stunning flatpicker who often sets her chops aside in favor of personal songwriting, emotive musicianship, and lush soundscapes. She spent seven years recording and touring with the bluegrass powerhouse Della Mae, and amidst that schedule also released *Nothing We Say* and two duet recordings. Since departing from Della Mae in 2018, she has continued her solo career and released two albums.

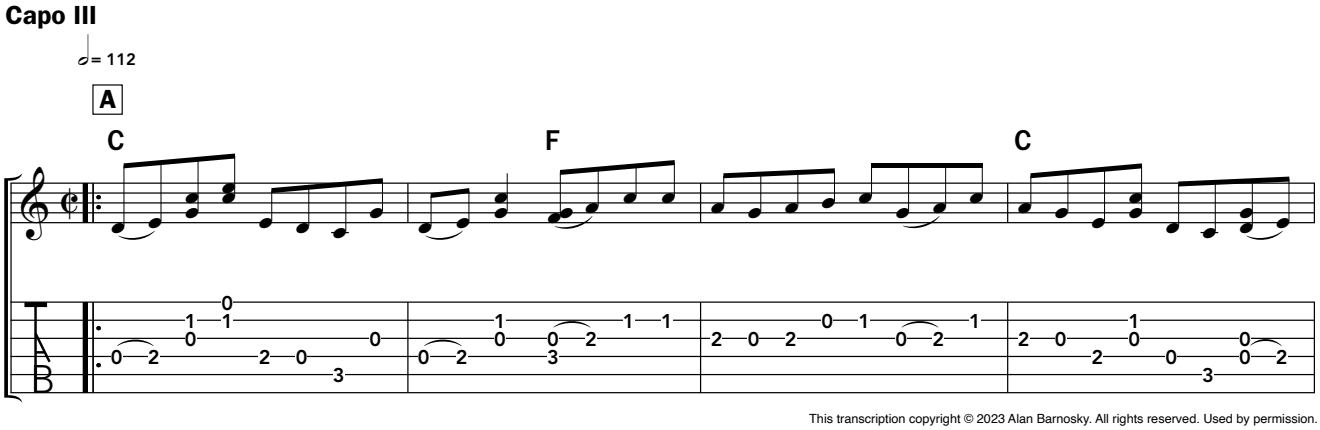
“Cumberland Gap” shows off both the depth of Hartman’s technique and her skillful musical sensibilities. Her arrangement is similar to how many contemporary fiddlers play the tune, loosely based on Fred Cockerham and Tommy Jarrell’s version but with some alterations and an additional third section. Hartman plays the form three times, with the first time through the A section being slightly extended. For each subsequent pass through the tune, she further alters and improvises the melody while keeping the underlying structure intact.

In this transcription I provide Hartman’s first time through the form, condensing some of the sections to allow for repeats and readability. There are two important techniques to make this arrangement shine. The first is using consistent picking throughout—downstrokes on the beats and upstrokes on the “ands.” Sticking with this pattern will provide a natural pulse that coincides with the downbeats.
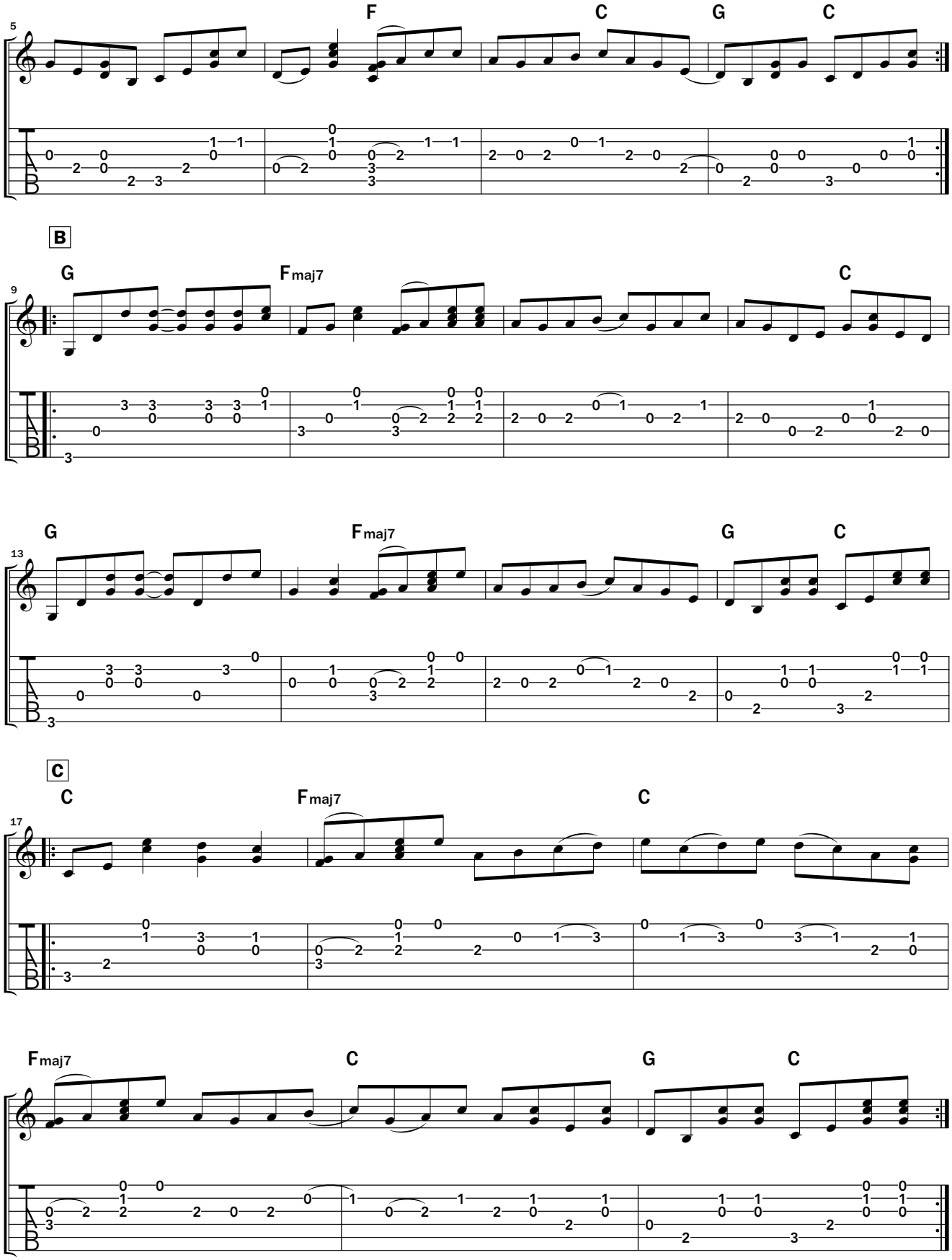
The second technique is to let both open strings and fretted notes ring as long as possible. For example, much of the first bar uses the standard open C chord shape. Even as the pick strikes other strings, keep the fretting fingers down to allow previous notes to ring, and don’t lift them up until you need to reposition. In particular, the first-fret C in measure 1 can be anchored until the open B appears in the middle of measure 3. Use this practice throughout and you may surprise yourself with how letting notes ring can dramatically alter the way a passage sounds. AG

CUMBERLAND GAP

TRADITIONAL, AS RECORDED BY COURTNEY HARTMAN



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5
F
C
G
C
B
9
G
Fmaj7
C
13
G
Fmaj7
G
C
C
17
C
Fmaj7
C
Fmaj7
C
G
C

VIDEO LESSON
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My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean

A well-known Scottish folk song of uncertain origin

BY MAURICE TANI



Maurice Tani

"My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" is a traditional Scottish folk song dating back to the mid-1800s, if not the 1700s. While the origin of the song is a bit murky, the original Bonnie is speculated to have been Charles Edward Stuart, aka Bonnie Prince Charlie. As leader of the Jacobite rising of 1745, his army was defeated by the British at the Battle of Culloden the following year. Stuart subsequently fled across the ocean from Scotland to France and over time became romanticized as a figure of heroic failure.

Of course, thanks to the ambiguous nature of the lyric, Bonnie could refer either to a man or woman, and the premise of the song could be interpreted as a love song as easily as historically rooted.

By the 1870s, "My Bonnie" had become popular with college and other singing groups on both sides of the Atlantic. Since then, it has regularly appeared in folk song collections and compilations. Its wide and long familiarity has also made it fertile ground for parody and updated versions, such as Tony Sheridan's rock 'n' roll arrangement with The Beatles.

As usual with these Campfire arrangements, I keep it simple, sticking to a handful of basic open chords: C, F, D7, A7, and G. But to keep things interesting I use a few twists—for instance, sometimes playing the C chord with a G in the bass, the D7 with an F♯ in the bass, and G6 (G B D E) rather than G (G B D).

For the strumming pattern, I use a classic waltz pattern—a bass note on beat 1, followed by strums on 2 and 3, all in downstrokes. Sometimes I throw in an upstroke strum on the "and" of beat 2 and/or 3. This helps keeps the proceedings lively. AG

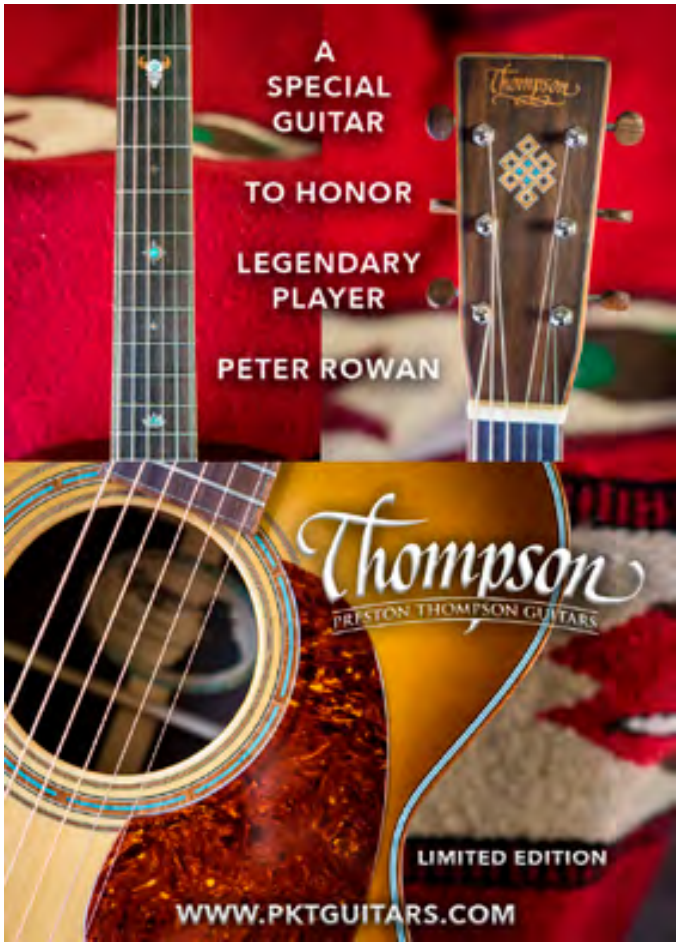


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Signed, Elizabeth Lusterman, Publisher





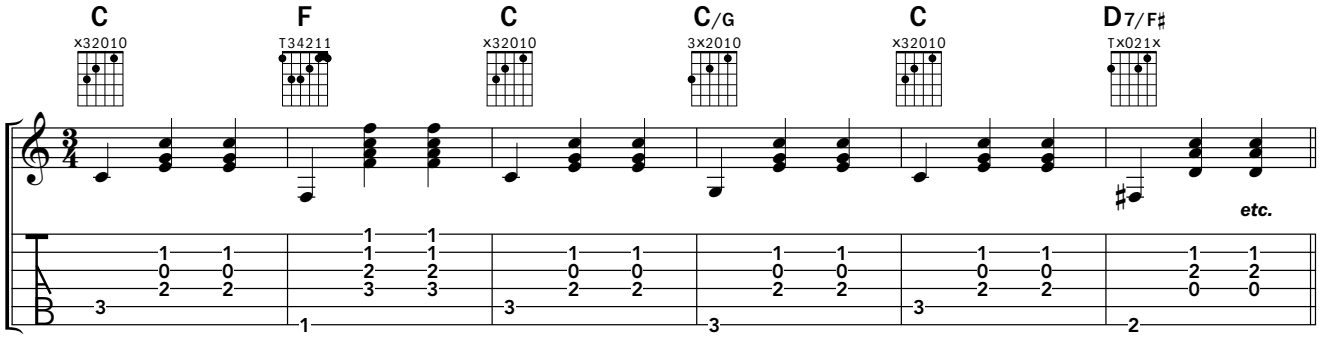




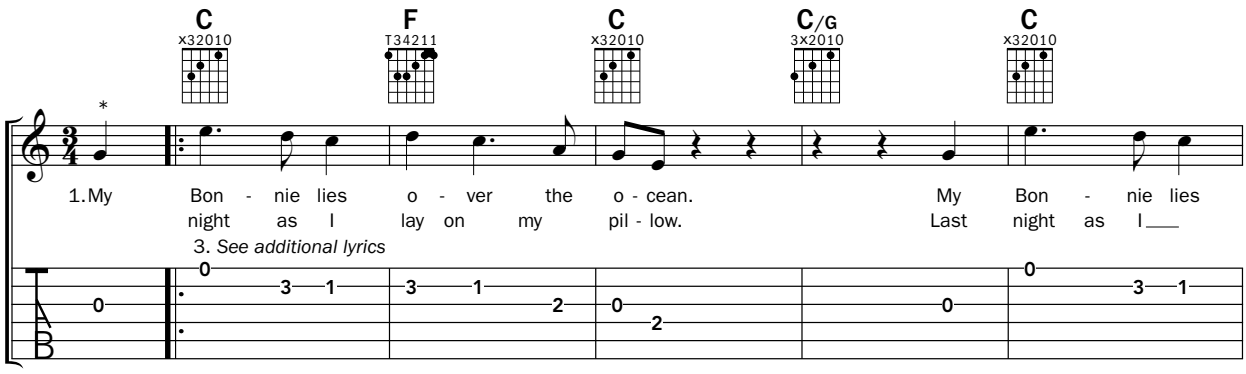
MY BONNIE LIES OVER THE OCEAN

TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY MAURICE TANI

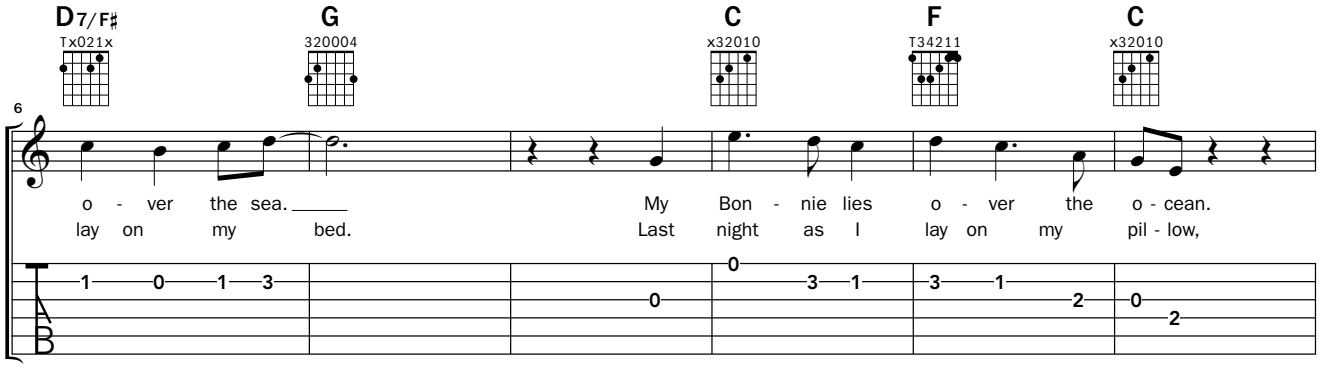
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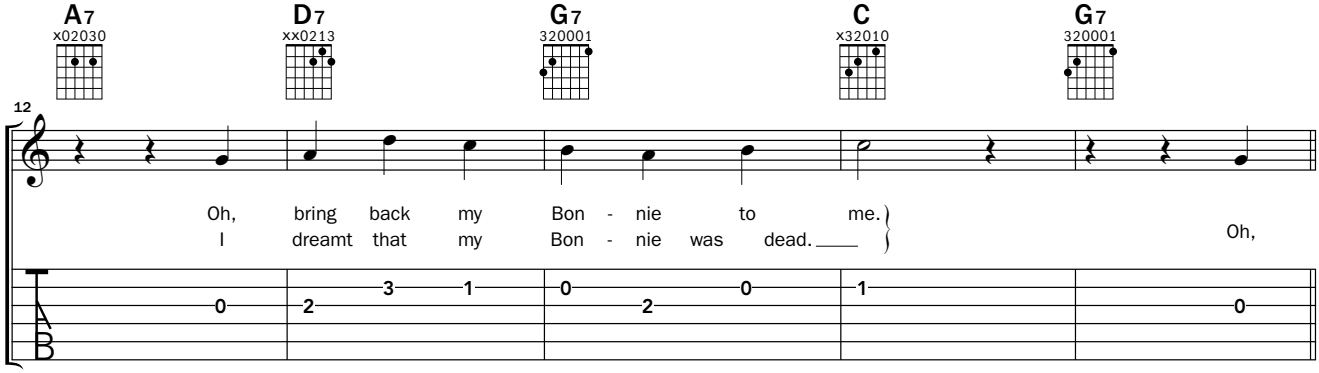


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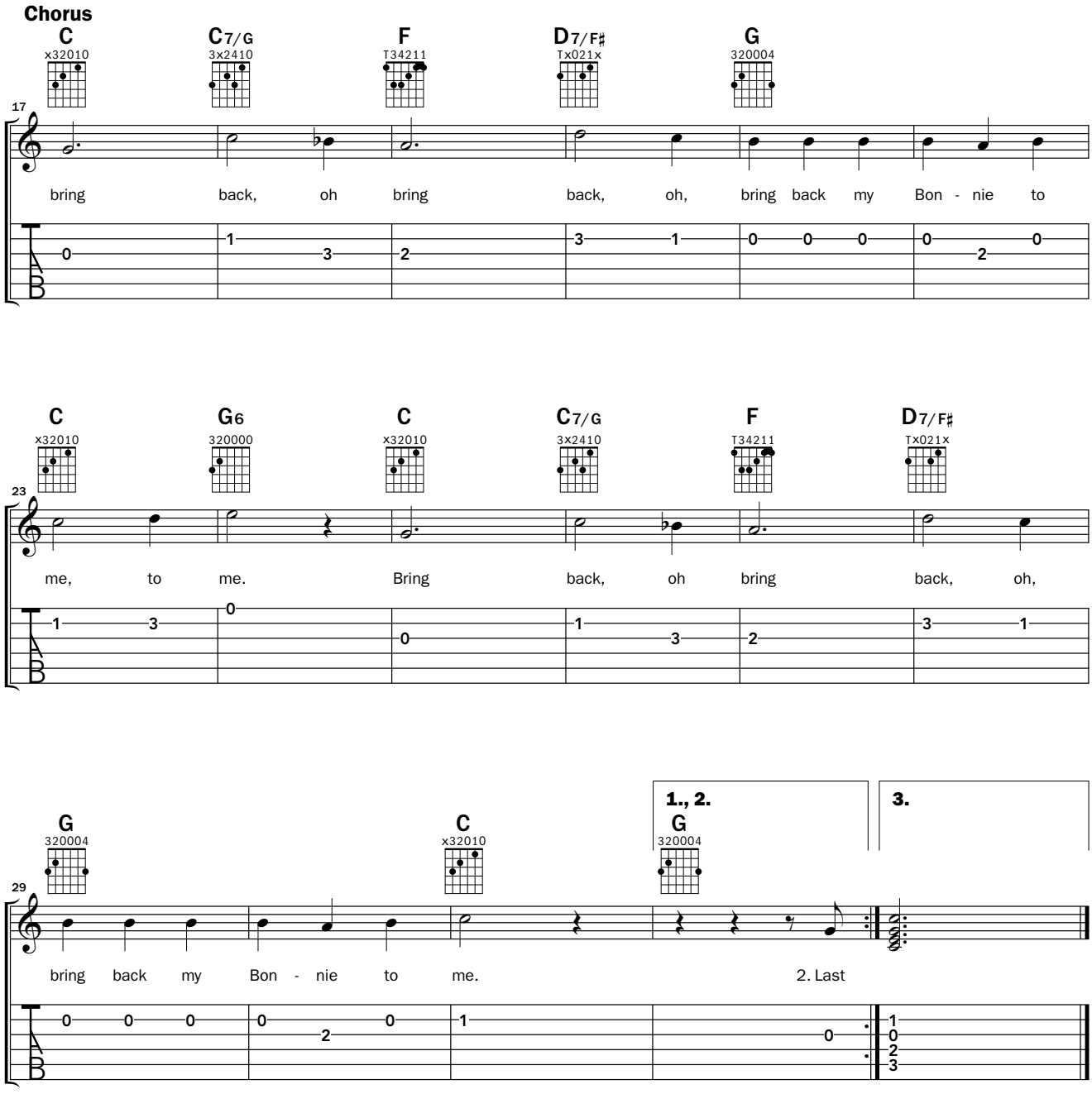


**Maurice Tani sings the melody an octave lower.*





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3. The winds have blown over the ocean
The winds have blown over the sea
The winds have blown over the ocean
And brought back my Bonnie to me

MAKERS & SHAKERS



JOE BASTURA/COLLINGS GUITARS

Wood Whisperer

Steve Nall steps into a big new role at Collings Guitars

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

When Collings Guitars lost its iconoclastic leader, Bill Collings, to cancer in the summer of 2017, the internet—or at least a tiny corner of it—was abuzz with gear nerds wondering whether the unimpeachable good quality of the company's instruments would begin to suffer. The same thing happened, albeit to a lesser extent, in March of last year, when Collings announced the retirement of its first employee, Bruce VanWart. Having joined Collings in 1989, VanWart personally selected the woods and voiced the tops and backs (i.e., determined the precise thicknesses for optimal tone and response) for each of tens of thousands of instruments. These would be no small shoes to fill.

What few people knew was that Collings' director of manufacturing, Steve Nall, had been working closely with VanWart for months to learn the ins and out of this crucial role. Nall, who is in his early 50s, has himself been with Collings for decades, working in all aspects of production from buffing to neck setting and designing instruments. But in absorbing the many nuances that go into choosing and making the best use of the wood for a given model—and there are so many of them in the Collings lineup—he only recently began to understand the guitars in all-new ways.

I first met Nall at a NAMM show several years before he had transitioned into his current role and was struck by the depth of his knowledge of all things guitar, and his modesty regarding the role he has played in the development of what are widely regarded as some of the finest modern production guitars. When I caught up with him late last summer, he was pleased to have mastered the last part of VanWart's job that he had assumed—and in his telling, the most nerve-wracking. After several weeks of careful watching and waiting, he had successfully overseen the kiln-drying of a year's worth of rosewood for the backs, sides, bridges, and fretboards of hundreds of instruments.

Nall was palpably relieved as we chatted about his new position, how he got there, and what he learned along the way from his mentors Collings and VanWart.

What was it like to work with Bruce VanWart before you transitioned into your current role at Collings? What are some of the things that you took away from the experience?

Bruce announced that he was leaving, and the next week it was decided that I would be the one to replace him. So, I followed him around for a week, watched what he did and asked a million questions. The very next week, he had me doing his job; he was just looking over me, which allowed me to learn what I didn't know, and gave us space to talk about the whole process along the way.

It started with wood selection—going through what's good for, say, a D2H versus a D2H T, as well as layouts. When you look at a piece of spruce or rosewood, there are so many possibilities for where the guitar's top or back is in that wood. Bruce had hard-and-fast rules about what a layout should look like. When I would try to pizzazz it up, he would slap my hand and say, "No, no, no—don't try to get cute!" It's a huge deal, because if you do get cute with it, it doesn't look like a Collings anymore. So I just got deep in Bruce's head, and he was so good at sharing the information. We worked together full-time every day for eight or nine months, and by the end, he was just kind of checking in on my voicings and layouts.

I saw Bruce every day for 20 years, and I love him. His leaving was a huge loss for us, but the good news is I feel like I've got this thing under control. I want to make sure that my guitars are no different than Bruce's guitars, and that nobody notices any difference, because a Collings is a Collings, and I'm not trying to put my little thumbprint on it.

It's interesting that you learned so much from VanWart in a short time after already having worked with him for 20 years.

Right—I had looked at the layouts on 25,000 Collings acoustics. But I'd never actually thought about why they were like that. And now as I'm walking by the buffing room—boom!—my eye goes right to the layout of a guitar, even though I've already seen it a half dozen times by the time it gets to that department, because I've had to thickness it and voice it and all that stuff. I have the same job, but it's a brand-new career at the same place.

In the Feedback section of *AG* [September/October 2020], you once wrote that Alex de Grassi had inspired your journey into lutherie. Can you revisit that period?

I played guitar from the time I was 13 or 14 in early '80s, learning Dio and Yngwie [Malmsteen] and Iron Maiden and Scorpions and all that stuff. My parents had a Windham Hill CD that I put on one day. It was Alex de Grassi, and it blew me away because I didn't even know that this stuff existed. I started buying his albums, did a little research and found out what instrument he was playing. Later, I was shopping for a new acoustic and came across a Lowden in Houston—a mahogany dreadnought with a cedar top. I sat down and played that guitar and it spoke to me like no other guitar ever had. I bought the Lowden, and I still have it. The top is quite thick, and the neck has these funny stripes in it, so I had to know what made it different. That led me to guitar-building school, at Roberto-Venn, and the rest is history. It's those two strange butterfly effects that led me here to doing what I'm doing, which is just crazy, because I'm unsuited to do anything else.

How did you end up at Collings, and can you talk about some of the different roles you've had there?

After graduating, in '99, I wanted to work for one of the smaller acoustic builders. I applied to 19 different places and got rejection letters from all of them. But I was at the top of my class, and the school got me a job in Boulder at Woodsong's [Lutherie] doing repair and restoration. About six months in, [Collings general manager] Steve McCreary [profiled in the December 2015 issue of *AG*] called Roberto-Venn, asking for a name, and thankfully they gave him mine.

'I want to make sure that my guitars are no different than Bruce's guitars, and that nobody notices any difference, because a Collings is a Collings, and I'm not trying to put my little thumbprint on it.'
–STEVE NALL

I showed up on my first day wearing pleated khaki Dockers and a black collared shirt that was starched, because my vision of Collings was all these fancy boys in lab coats making these beautiful guitars. And Steve came out and said, "Man, you're overdressed!" I started in buffing, just like everybody did at the time. And then as needs arose, if you were a good guy, they'd pull you to go work somewhere else. So I worked my butt off in buffing and moved to bridges and pickguards, and then to the front end of the neck department to neck set.

Bill really liked me in that department, so I was his neck guy for 12 years or so. I loved it, because there's a lot to making necks, and it kept me interested. Bill liked you or he didn't. And if he liked you, he spent a lot of time and investment in you to make sure that you got what was in his head, because it was such an important part of the designs.

Eventually I was tasked with helping redesign the mandolins, redoing the necks, because I was using the skills that Bill had helped me develop. Eventually I got promoted to production manager. If somebody was on vacation or honeymoon, because I'd been here for so long, I'd fill in, sand bridges, or set necks. So I kind of floated around for a while, and then when Bruce announced his retirement, we bumped the production coordinator to manager, and I began working full-time with Bruce before he left.

There are so many stories in the industry about what a character Bill was. Do you have a favorite anecdote?

I have a million anecdotes, but my very favorite is when I started working here, I was so intimidated by Bill. I came in one Saturday to impress him—he was always there working, whether on a guitar or hot rod—and he said, "Hey, man, I need you to move this angle iron that's outside up to the mandolin room." There were ten pieces of angle iron, so I grabbed as many as I could carry. Meanwhile, Bill had this stuffed rattlesnake that was coiled, as if ready to strike, that he had hidden in the grass behind the pile. I got to the last piece, saw that rattlesnake, screamed, jumped, and ran. Bill was around the corner, and he was purple he was laughing so hard. He had been sitting there the whole time waiting on the payoff. After that, he called me Snake for a year or two.

That was my first interaction with Bill. The next weekend I went into work, and he started showing me computer renderings of his perfect neck, line by line. He said, "Look, it's not a heel, a shaft, and a headstock—it's one continuous line. That's what makes it my neck, and I don't want you to mess this up." That was just my second or third week, and we just continued on that, tinkering to try to make things better and better. It still goes on today with [director of engineering] Clint [Watson] and Aaron [Huff, head of electric guitars and archtops]. All of the guys that were here with Bill have that same thing built into us now, and we're constantly trying to make the guitars better.

What does that look like?

You might have a guy like Julian Lage coming in saying, "Your standard OM is too much guitar for me," and us going, "What does that mean?" Bill got it right off the bat, and we wouldn't have done that without Julian. Another thing that I learned is that one guitar

isn't the end-all, be-all. And so, the Julian [OM1 JL, reviewed in the April 2018 issue] is different than the Traditional OM, and the Traditional OM is different than the standard Collings OM. Then we have all these great guitars that wouldn't have happened if we had rested on our laurels. If you would've left it up to the young me, it would have been, Don't mess with it if it ain't broke. And that is just not the motto of this company.

It seems like Collings was much less a savvy businessman than a brilliant luthier and engineer—case in point, no pun intended, being the handcrafted cases you made in-house for a few years.

Bill was never concerned about the bottom line. There has never been another company our size that had five product lines going at the same time—none of which were profitable in a business sense. Bill wanted to make cases, and nobody ever looked at the books and said, "Well, we have to charge this amount and make that amount every week for it to be viable." Bill just had faith that if he made the best cases we could, they would sell.

The initial impulse for the Waterloos was born out of Bill falling in love with an old Kalamazoo. And the idea was we could take the cull, or scrap, from the Collings line and use it on Waterloos [inspired by the Kalamazoo]. But once we designed the guitars, we couldn't do that, because the neck and the angles were different from Collings. That didn't matter to Bill; he wanted to make the guitar that he wanted to make. So the money always came after, and we hoped for the best.

Bill would just *go*, and you went along for the ride. It was a great ride, because it was fun to make cases, and it was fun to make Waterloos. It was fun to make ukuleles, which we started doing in 2007 or '08, around the time of the Great Recession, when the guitar orders dried out. In Bill's mind, we could make a ukulele in three hours, because that's how long it took him. But in reality, a ukulele took just about as long to make as a guitar. Yes, there's less material on it, but it's a Collings, so it's got all the same attention to detail. Ultimately, the ukuleles didn't make money, but we sold them and they made just enough that we could pay everybody and keep the doors open until the guitar orders came back.

To Bill's credit, we're still here, and we're doing the best that we can with what he left us, which is such a treasure. The crew we have is just phenomenal, and my job now—not just me, but all the guys that were here with Bill—is to pass on what we know, so Collings stays Collings for generations.



JOE BASTURA/COLLINGS GUITARS

What has the company been like in the five years since Bill Collings died?

Well, the first year was scary, because we didn't know what would happen. The public perception was that Bill was making every guitar, so we were afraid with his passing that people would think that the guitars would change. The other fear was about staffing; Bill was a huge draw because everyone wanted to learn guitar-building from him. Both of those concerns ended up being unfounded, and once we got through the weirdness that Bill wasn't going to be walking through the shop anymore, it kind of went on business as usual.

Because we all agree what Bill would have wanted, there really haven't been any disagreements about new models. He was a big enough personality and had such a huge influence on all of it that it's been really easy with those tricky decisions of releasing guitars like the Waterloo archtop and the 470 JL [Julian Lage signature model electric.] Even though Bill didn't have his thumb on those guitars, he is all over them. We are just kind of trying to move forward with whatever that means to us individually.

Given how deeply you are involved in guitar making, do you get a chance to play much these days?

I play every guitar that comes through every morning. As I voice the tops and backs, I take notes, which I keep in a little binder. If I'm particularly happy with a guitar, I write down the serial number and my thoughts on the top and the back. And then when that guitar hits final inspection, I look at my notes and get to hear how it turned out.

I don't really get to play guitar at home, but I've challenged myself to learn a new song every day, which is so fun. Today it was "Rocket Man" and yesterday it was a tune by Alanis Morissette. Sometimes a guitar will hang out for a couple of days after it is set up, and I'm fortunate to get to hear it with fresh ears before it ships out. I listen to the guitars with my colleagues, and we all talk about our impressions and what we are doing right. But the very first thing I do every day is walk right into the inspection room, before I even put my bag down, and play those guitars. **AG**

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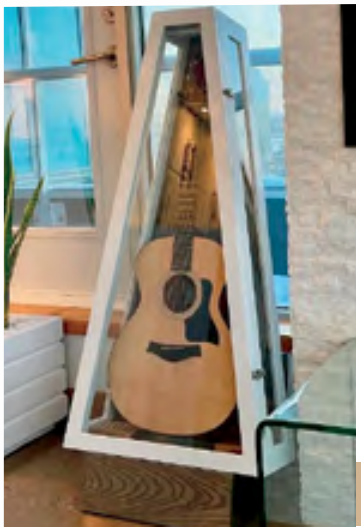
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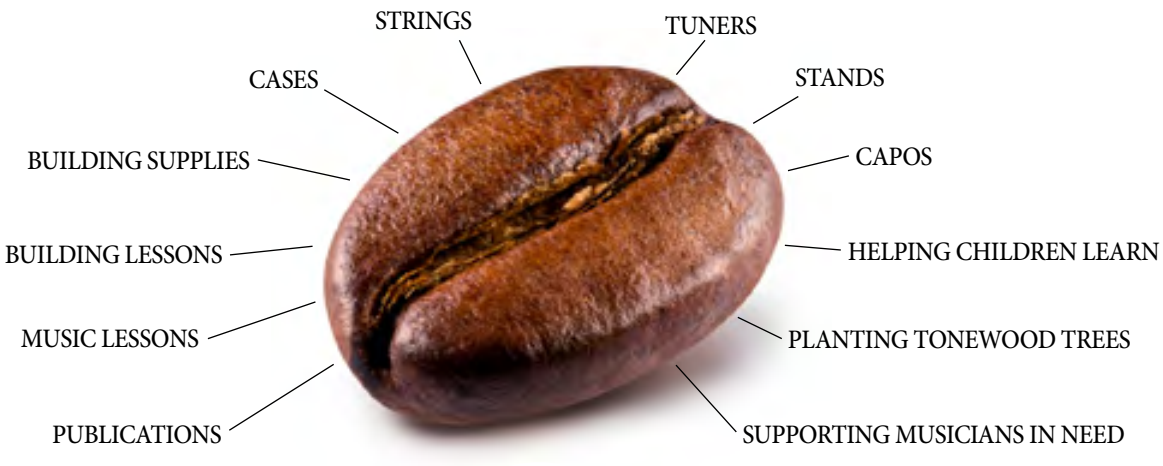
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On Balance

How the weight of guitar bodies and necks interact–and much more

BY MARTIN KEITH

Q: How important is the weight ratio between the guitar body and the neck—would it be impossible to play a guitar that has a neck heavier than its body? Also, if I wanted to make a guitar using a very heavy wood, how would that affect the sound, and which type would you recommend? —*Sarah Belal*

A: I'm glad you asked! As with nearly every design-level consideration, this seemingly simple question leads us down quite a few different paths, all of which are worth exploring.

The first and simplest aspect of the neck-to-body weight ratio is balance. Acoustic guitar bodies are generally fairly light despite their size. As a result, a heavy neck can easily result in an instrument that is poorly balanced, whose neck falls towards the floor when not supported by the player's left hand. Players who find this particularly annoying will sometimes replace their tuners with lighter-weight models, in hopes of improving the guitar's balance. This can work quite well, but these players often discover that the tone and response of their guitar has changed along with the tuners. This somewhat surprising fact leads us to the deeper discussion of the role of the neck in tone production.

Traditional acoustic necks are mostly made from mahogany or maple. These time-tested woods offer a good mix of strength, stability, medium weight, and easy workability. The tones they produce have defined our understanding of what guitars sound like, and thus we should expect that substituting other woods will make guitars with less familiar (and potentially less marketable) tones.

A heavy neck can easily result in an instrument that is poorly balanced.



BILL EVANS

The energy produced by plucking a string is finite and drops off fairly quickly after the initial attack. Most of the tone qualities we try to describe—sustain, compression, etc.—are all functions of how the guitar absorbs the energy from the string. In fact, it's useful to think of every aspect of the guitar in terms of how it subtracts energy from the string—how much, at what speed, and at which frequencies. The most obvious is the top, or the engine of the guitar, which is driven to vibrate by the strings, engaging the air pump of the guitar body to produce sound. However, nearly every component of the instrument will vibrate when the instrument is played, and most will affect the tone, even though they don't contribute to actual air movement.

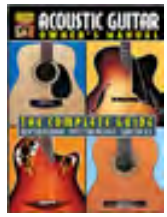
The neck can be thought of as a pendulum which swings back and forth when excited by the string energy. The factors that will affect the swing of that pendulum are its length, its weight, and the stiffness of the "string" that it swings on, which in this case is the actual neck material itself. A heavier neck will have more inertia, and thus will be less likely to move from the string's small energy input. This inertia lowers the resonant frequency of the neck assembly, by slowing it down. By contrast, a rigid neck will be less likely to move because it is more resistant to the back-and-forth movements of vibration, which raises the resonant frequency by creating a shorter period of oscillation. Although they have different effects, increasing either (or both) of these factors will



Martin Keith

GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or another topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar*'s repair expert Martin Keith by sending an email titled "Repair Expert" to Editors.AG@stringletter.com and we'll forward it to Keith.



If your question is selected for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of *AG*'s *Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual.*

yield a neck that reflects more of the string energy back into the string, promoting sustain and a longer note envelope.

Even the headstock itself can have a meaningful effect on the guitar's tone. In my repair work, I have fixed many (many, many!) broken headstocks. For some of the worst cases, I have laminated rear layers of ebony or other dense woods as a cap to keep the broken neck together. It's not uncommon for players to report an improvement in the guitar's tone and sustain after such a repair—the stiffer headstock loses less energy to vibration, and thus more energy is left to drive the top and produce sound. On electric basses, it's possible to move or even eliminate the classic fifth-fret dead spot by pressing the headpiece against a wall, or by clamping weights to it.

With most woods, weight and rigidity travel together—heavy, dense species such as ebony, rosewood, wenge, oak, and others tend to be strong and stiff, whereas lighter types such as spruce, poplar, and basswood are less so. Some makers have developed necks using these heavy, dense woods, either as strengthening laminations, or even as solid wood necks; recent PRS instruments with rosewood necks are a great example. Other intrepid boutique builders have been experimenting with wenge and other high-density hardwoods as primary neck materials. Modern luthiers and even some factories have also begun tipping the scales (pun intended) by adding carbon fiber, titanium, and other lightweight stiffening materials to their necks to increase rigidity without adding significant weight.

It's useful to think of every aspect of the guitar in terms of how it subtracts energy from the string.

What should the maker expect from a dense hardwood neck? In my experience, these woods contribute a bright, lively tone with a more percussive attack, noticeably increased sustain (due to both their stiffness and their mass), and some natural compression—likely the result of the neck reflecting more of the string's energy back into the vibrating length. The weight difference will be quite noticeable, and players who play standing up may be particularly aware of the altered balance. I will also warn you ahead of time that carving a wenge or rosewood neck is quite a workout, much more so than good old mahogany.

It is an exciting time for the world of alternative guitar woods. Traditional materials are becoming more and more difficult to source in good quality, and new choices are emerging each year. Woods that were once very uncommon (wenge, katalox, ziricote, manchinga, t'zalam, and others) are becoming more and more accepted by builders and the markets they serve. At the same time, players are opening their eyes to the new spectrum of sounds that these woods produce. Although tops, backs, and sides are the most common places for innovative builders to experiment, neck materials can absolutely have a big effect on the tone and response of an instrument, and it's a great place to explore. If you use a bolt-on neck construction, you can even build multiple necks from different materials, allowing direct comparison of the neck's tonal contribution. As more and more builders begin to realize the impact of neck wood on guitar tone, I think we will see more and more alternatives beginning to appear, which is great news for both builders and players. AG

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NEW GEAR

Hill Guitar Company Companion

A compact crossover nylon-string from the esteemed classical luthier

BY MARK GOLDENBERG

Kenny Hill knows guitars. Hill is a renowned luthier, a composer of fine contemporary music, and an accomplished performer as well. The nylon-string instruments made in limited numbers in his Ben Lomond, California, workshop are in the elite stratosphere, pricey and exquisite. Incorporating modern features like double tops, elevated fretboards, soundports, and True Temperament frets, these guitars are generally bold and articulate, with great note separation, superb dynamic range, spot-on intonation, and fantastic playability.

Hill's latest model, the Companion, is a short-scale parlor-sized instrument that costs a fraction of the other guitars made in the California shop. The Companion is designed to be a professional-quality travel instrument for a classical guitarist or a crossover guitar for the steel-string player. It can be ordered with a variety of tonewood combinations, from the traditional spruce and rosewood to all-maple, for a personalized instrument.

Not long ago, Hill visited my home in the Los Angeles area to show me a couple of freshly made Companions, one with a spruce soundboard and rosewood back and sides and the other built entirely of rosewood. Both instruments sounded great—notably present and well-balanced. The spruce-topped version had a crisp tone, while its all-rosewood counterpart sounded darker and mysterious. Hill left the latter with me, and I truly enjoyed getting to know it.

SIMPLE DESIGN AND EXCELLENT EXECUTION

Fit and finish are exemplary on the handsomely austere Companion. There's a Shaker-like simplicity to the design, from the thin concentric lines of the rosette to the stark monolith of a maple tie block on the rosewood bridge. Unless you count the matching rosewood heel cap and headstock veneer, the guitar's only ornamentation is a narrow band of maple sepa-



PHOTOS: MAGGIE KING/HILL GUITAR COMPANY





rating the two back plates. All of these aspects really highlight the beauty of the woods, as does the perfectly applied satin lacquer finish.

The guitar's Golden Age tuners are not just attractive with their engraved brass plates and pearloid knobs, they work smoothly and hold the pitch very well. And although the Companion doesn't sport True Temperament frets as on the highest-end Hill models, the intonation is spot-on; chords both simple and complex ring together beautifully up and down the neck.

The Companion feels very inviting to hold and play. Rosewood is thought of as being a heavy tonewood, but the guitar is light and well-balanced. Substantial but not chunky, the neck has a very comfortable D-shaped profile with plenty of shoulder. With a 620mm (24.41-inch) scale length fretboard and 48mm (1.89-inch) nut width, it's also great for a guitarist who has smaller hands, and the short scale makes playing ordinarily difficult finger stretches a breeze. While the action on the review model is a little high for my taste, there's plenty of room to lower the saddle, and, unlike most nylon-string guitars, the Companion has an adjustable truss rod for adjusting the neck relief.

A CAPTIVATING VOICE

Overall, the Companion has a pleasing, round tone with ample bass and plump trebles. There's a three-dimensional quality to the notes; the sound surrounds you and pulls you in—an effect likely enhanced by the soundports on the upper bouts.

I tried a range of fingerstyle repertoire on the Companion, including some of my own pieces, which are in the contemporary classical/jazz vein; my woodshed tune of the month, the jazz standard "Blue Bossa"; a bunch of exercises from Mauro Giuliani's *120 Studies for Right Hand Development*; and an arrangement of the traditional song "Shenandoah" that I've been working on. The guitar sounded equally beautiful in all these different contexts, with great clarity and note separation.

When I played some single-note lines with a flatpick, the Companion responded equally well. With this technique, the guitar's throaty midrange becomes apparent. I even felt a bit of a David Rawlings/small archtop vibe when I dug in with the pick, showing that the guitar has a versatile voice.

There's a three-dimensional quality to the notes; the sound surrounds you and pulls you in.

While I had good fun playing the Companion around the house—its round, mysterious quality was a nice match for my late-night modal meanderings—it would also be a great guitar to have in the studio. I could definitely see the instrument's bell-like chords and round lead lines making for a great solo recording, or sitting nicely among other tracks.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Time slips away when you play a guitar as well-built and captivating as the Hill Companion. With its compact body, it's equally suited for the road and the couch. The guitar's short scale length and relatively narrow nut would feel like home to a steel-string guitarist, and the instrument would be a great option for discriminating players looking to add the sophisticated sound of a nylon-string to their arsenals. A fine companion indeed! **AG**

SPECS

BODY Parlor size 12-fret; solid rosewood top, back, and sides; fan bracing; twin soundports; rosewood bridge with maple tie block and compensated saddle; satin lacquer finish

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PRS SE A20E

Cutaway acoustic-electric boasts versatility and affordability

BY KATE KOENIG

PRS Guitars might be most celebrated for its high-end electrics, but in recent years, the company has been offering acoustic players a lot of bang for the buck with its SE Series steel-strings. These flattops are now available in three sizes—Angelus Cutaway, Tonare Grand, and Tonare Parlor—each with several different tonewood options. They are distinctive-looking guitars, incorporating details borrowed from their electric counterparts, like PRS's trademark bird fretboard inlays. At the same time, the SEs incorporate the hybrid X/classical bracing pattern found in the Private Stock instruments PRS makes in very limited numbers in its Maryland shop. From the Angelus series, I checked out the new SE A20E and was impressed as much by its easy playability as its bright yet flexible tonal range.

COMPACT AND COMFORTABLE

With its Angelus Cutaway body, the SE A20E has a lower bout of 15.5 inches, close in size to a standard 14-fret dreadnought. The guitar is constructed entirely of mahogany (solid top and laminated back and sides) and, like all the other SE acoustics, features the aforementioned hybrid X/classical bracing that is said to allow the top to vibrate more freely, translating to enhanced projection and sound.

The review model arrived with low action, which is ideal for me. But I did hear some slight buzzing across all six strings at the second fret and higher. Depending on your playing style, the guitar could benefit from a professional setup out of the box. Otherwise, the SE A20E's playability is smooth. While the neck shape is described as wide-fat, it feels relatively slender and fast, an effect enhanced by its inviting satin finish and good fretwork, free from the sharp edges sometimes found on instruments at this price point.

STRIKING LOOKS AND GOOD RESONANCES

Visually speaking, the SE A20E makes a statement fresh out of the case with its glossy black top and asymmetric headstock. The guitar's unique aesthetic is further defined by those



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRS GUITARS





trademark bird inlays across the fretboard, and the body is accented by crème binding as well as the classy touch of herringbone purfling and rosette detailing. But the SE A20E is not merely well-appointed. Once you begin to play it, it becomes immediately apparent that it has just as much to offer sonically.

The SE A20E is noticeably resonant, with a strong midrange and clear highs. And although the low end is slightly less audible, you can still sense its presence underneath the more impressive mid-to-high frequency ranges. As would be expected for an instrument of its size, the guitar has good projection and volume. It rings out enthusiastically when strummed; the notes are clear and pronounced, with good string separation in chords, giving way to satisfying overtones.

With a flatpick, I tried playing some songs of my own, which fall into the folk-rock category, as well as some tunes like "Stickshifts and Safetybelts" by Cake and the solo from Sublime's "Santeria." Each accented melody line cut through with impressive clarity, producing tones that sat comfortably in the midrange but were still couched in a good balance of registers.

As for fingerpicking, without the use of acrylic nails or a thumb pick, the dynamic stays soft and gentle. I enjoy playing classical pieces by composers like J.S. Bach, Francisco Tárrega, and Nikita Koshkin on steel-string guitars; in this context, the SE A20E's midrange and high end come out together in nuanced layers, giving the compositions a unique texture.

The SE A20E is outfitted with a PRS-voiced Fishman Sonitone undersaddle pickup, which has the usual thumbwheel volume and tone controls positioned conveniently underneath the soundhole. And it arguably sounds even better amplified than it does unplugged. Almost anything below the highest tone setting sounds great; the low setting gives off a bold, vivid tone without being overpowering, and the mid setting has a fitting roundness to it.

It rings out enthusiastically when strummed.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The PRS SE A20E boasts an adaptable tonal palette along with good comfort and playability, not to mention a distinctive appearance. The guitar responds equally well to flatpicking and fingerpicking, and, given its excellent amplified sound, it is a great option for any guitarist looking for a nice all-purpose acoustic on a limited budget. AG

SPECS

BODY Angelus Cutaway shape; solid mahogany top; layered mahogany back and sides; hybrid X/classical bracing; ebony bridge; bone saddle with 2-7/32" string spacing; glossy top finish with satin back and sides

NECK Mahogany neck; double-acting truss rod; wide-fat profile; 1-11/16" bone nut; 25.3" scale length; ebony fretboard; bird inlays

OTHER PRS Classic Acoustic strings 80/20, light (012–.053); PRS-voiced Fishman Sonitone electronics; gig bag

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prsguitars.com

PLAYLIST



Joe Robinson
The Prize
(Joe's Garage)

CYNTHIA WILSON

An Exhilarating Turn

Joe Robinson explores new directions on eclectic collection

BY KENNY BERKOWITZ

At 31, Joe Robinson can look back on his jaw-dropping television debut and tell his online audience, "I actually wasn't really that great." Maybe, maybe not, but that 30 seconds of acoustic guitar shredding on The Beatles' "Day Tripper" was the prelude to winning *Australia's Got Talent* with an even flashier, even more awesome performance of Mason Williams' "Classical Gas," played with the single-minded intensity of a 16-year-old guitar obsessive.

Within a week of collecting $250,000 in prize money, Robinson was already in Nashville, and 15 years and thousands of gigs later, he's still there, steadily working on his craft. His guitar lessons typically draw thousands of views on YouTube, and his performance videos easily draw hundreds of thousands more, with him playing and singing pop classics like Stevie Wonder's "Isn't She Lovely" alongside jazz standards like "All of Me" and "Misty." Through them all, fingerpicking an ever-expanding collection of acoustic and electric guitars, he's found his grown-up groove—a laid-back, smooth soulfulness that's jazzy without being cerebral, played with an effortlessness that makes all this incredible technique look easy.

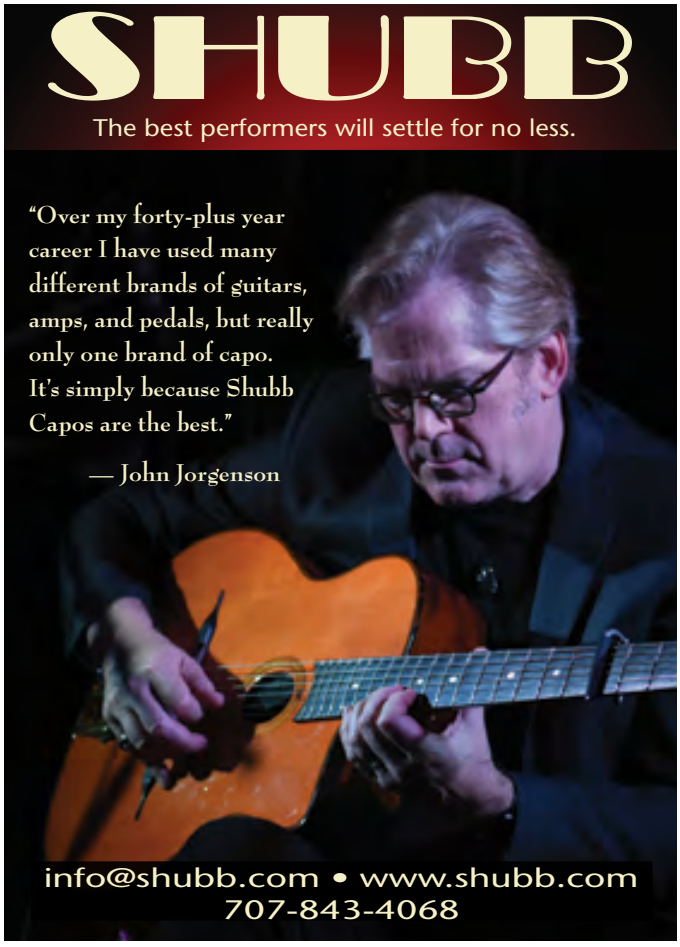
It's not by a longshot, and with this seventh full-length album, he's reaching fozr the biggest prize of all: writing songs that are as good as his guitar playing. It's a tall order, especially for a guitar phenom who started touring with Tommy Emmanuel at 11 years old. For this next stage, Robinson reached out to another mentor, Nashville producer/engineer/hitmaking songwriter Brent Maher, to co-write the ten songs on *The Prize,* making the album a major step into the world of pop music for Robinson.

It's a far-ranging collection, covering a wide variety of styles and sporting first-rate support from some of Nashville's finest. On "Gotta Keep Moving," which opens the album with a funky fingerpicking riff on Robinson's signature 2011 Maton J.R. Personal, the momentum builds with synthesized horns (played on keyboards by Tim Lauer), rock-steady bass (Glenn Worf), hand drums (Nir Zidkyahu), organ fills (Lauer), backup singers (a multitracked Wendy Moten), and a pair of guitar solos that recall peak George Benson and Lenny Breau.

Shifting gears, Robinson gets into a cool shuffle groove peppered with quick fingerstyle ornaments on "The Prize," plays alongside a string quartet on "Fine Line," channels a young Merle Travis on "Wandering Man," and flirts with rockabilly on "Got a Woman to Love." On "Winds of Change," he lays down an acoustic solo so smooth and sweet it would make Chet Atkins proud. And on a pair of songs, he goes electric with his 2014 Fender Custom Shop 1963 Stratocaster ("So Much More") and 1990 Ibanez GB10 ("Moonlight & Magic"), each as warm as any of the album's acoustic cuts.

In the sweetest turn of all, Robinson goes all-out romantic on "Where Would We Be Without Love," and even though I wish the lyrics could dig deeper, I find myself singing along, marveling at the guitar brilliance, the soulful pop glow of the production, and the careful perfection of tone and technique. AG

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2022 Big Hollow Jumbo

A loyal customer inspires a bold new build

BY GREG OLWELL

Many of today's guitar makers fall into either the modern or reproduction camp of lutherie—but not Big Hollow Guitars' Bevan Frost, who carves his own path from his workshop in Frisco, Colorado. With Big Hollow, Frost strives to build instruments that feel familiar but are different. "It's important to have something to say, and I want to make an artistic statement that is also a historical reinterpretation," he says.

Most Big Hollow models are sized like the parlor guitars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with curvier shapes and modern updates for usability and practicality. When a repeat customer, novelist Joseph Skibell, asked Frost to build a large-bodied guitar with unique inlays, the luthier rose to the challenge. The result is this Jumbo, a historical reinterpretation of Gibson's iconic Super Jumbo. "I didn't exactly copy the guitar's outline," Frost explains. "I put a Big Hollow Guitar flavor on the curves."

This means that the Big Hollow Jumbo has a narrower waist and rounded shoulders compared to the classic jumbo silhouette. The body's intensely flamed maple back and sides and spruce top are finished in a natural oil varnish. For the neck, Frost used laminated construction—layers of koa and Spanish cedar. At Skibell's request, the face of the guitar is ringed with blue reconstituted stone, and the back and sides are outlined with blue wooden purfling. As a play on the writer's name, the headstock shows a bell peeking out from behind a cloud, while cloud inlays adorn the bridge.

Ultimately, Skibell got the guitar he envisioned, and Frost says he is "really glad that I have somebody who's not afraid to send me off into the unknown." AG



MICHAEL MURPHY

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